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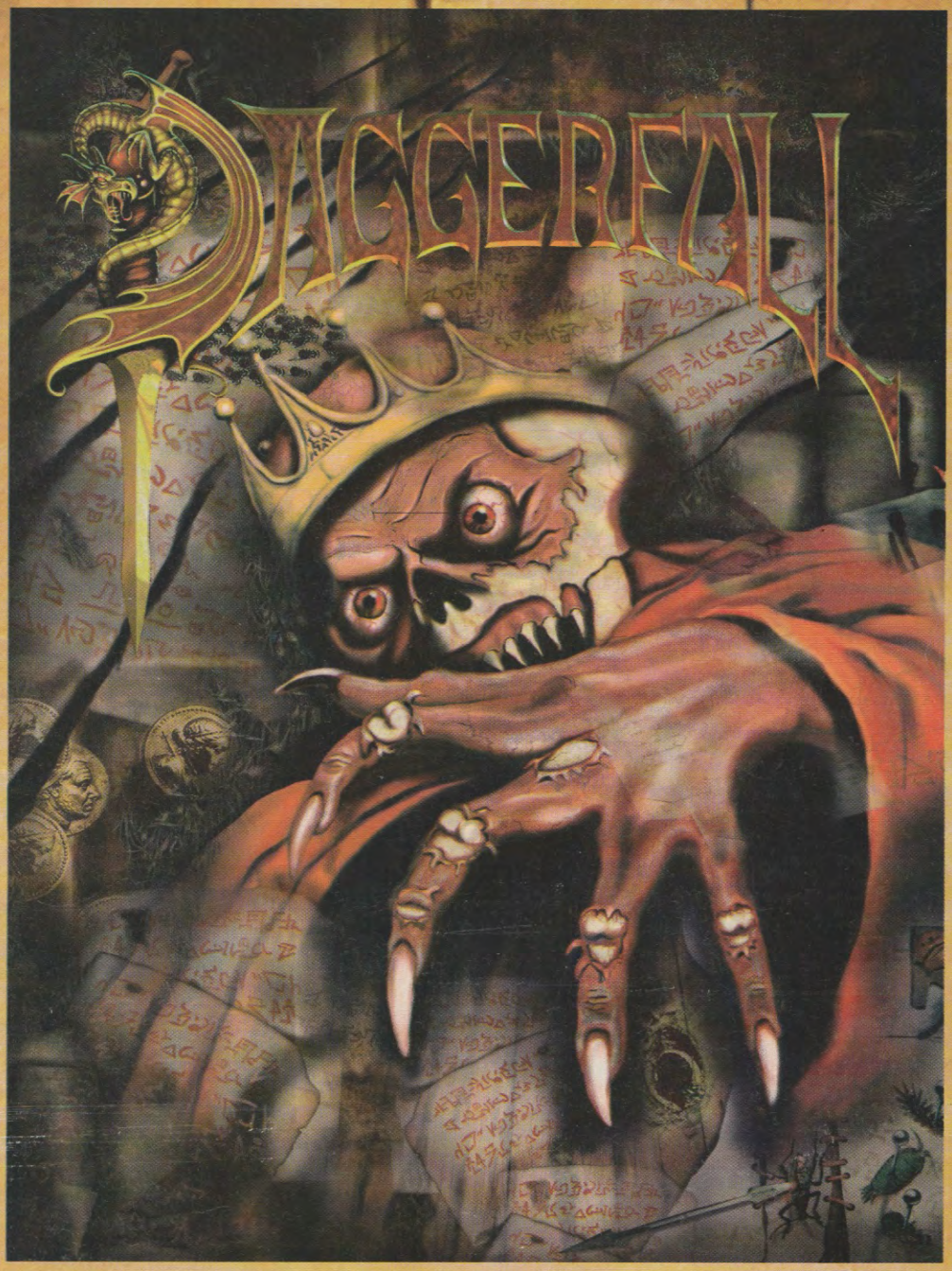

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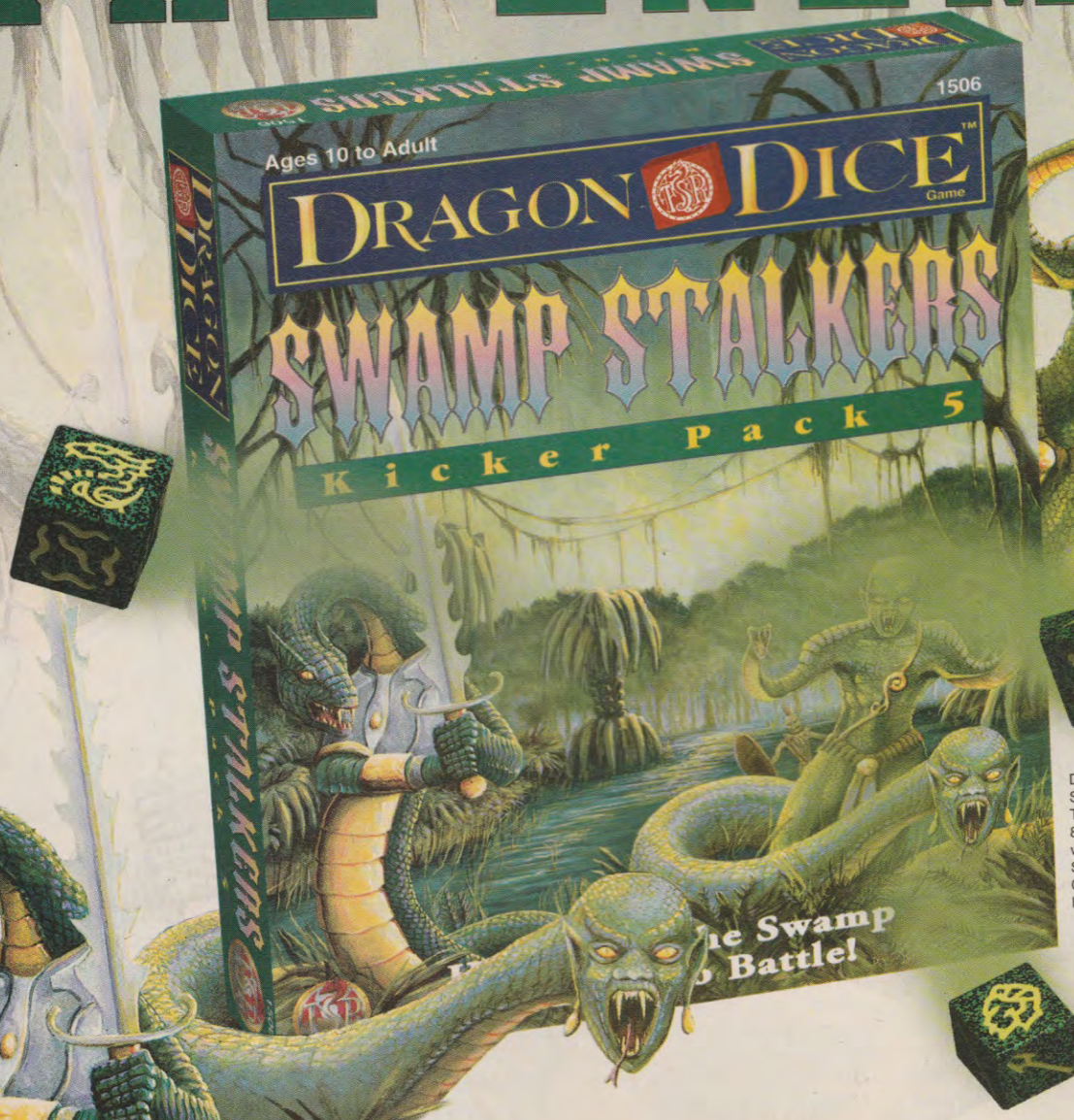

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WIN! COPIES OF *THE SETTLERS OF CATAN* TURN TO PAGE 15

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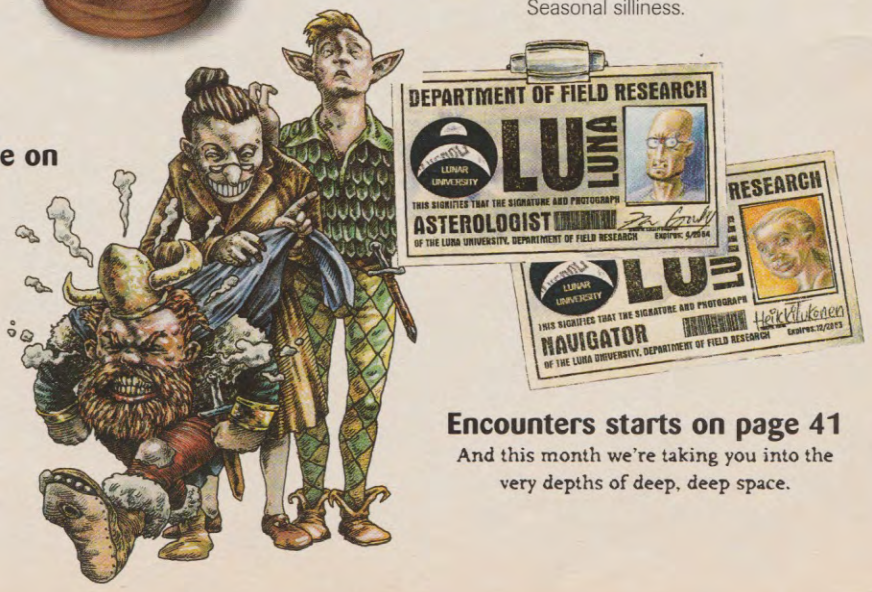
It's the best board game in the world – find out why in our definitive (and rather fun) review.

Bringing the cinema to your table on page 38

How to use movies as the perfect inspiration for your roleplaying scenarios.

Marriage of Inconvenience on page 58

Understanding characters' needs and satisfying them.



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And this month we're taking you into the very depths of deep, deep space.

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This issue would have been impossible without... **late nights**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... ***Terris*** **addiction**

Good evening, and welcome to the show!

"I'll trade you three sheep and a rock for two bricks and a tree."

No, not what you'd usually expect conversation to consist of in the **arcane** office, but there's been rather a lot of that kind of nonsense going on this month. And not just here – it's been the same in my house, and in Andy's, and in Steve Faragher's, and in several others. What have we been up to? Playing *The Settlers of Catan*, a board game from Mayfair Games that we simply can't put down. Every waking hour we've been thinking of how we can increase the size of settlements, build longer roads and otherwise get one up on our best mates. It's quite scary, and our partners are starting to get justifiably upset about it.

It's this hold over us that *Settlers* has, and the fact that it is a perfect board game in every way, that has given us cause to give it a full ten out of ten in the review (see page 62). Now, I could be accused of giving too much away too early by telling you the game's score on the editorial page, but I wanted to do so for a reason: to explain exactly why we have a number-based games rating, and to emphasise the importance that we attribute to it.

For a start, when a reviewer knows that he's got to give a game a rating at the end of the review, his mind it focused, and, therefore, so is his copy. When you've got to give a definitive score at the end, there's no sitting on the fence, or copping out of giving an honest, balanced review – whether it be favourable or not. When there's a score to give, the text of the review must reflect this score – a reviewer must not only pass opinion, but justify that opinion, and the final score given. This, I feel, ensures that you know exactly why something we've reviewed in **arcane** is good or bad. We don't merely comment on how a game works, but on whether it does the job it sets out to do, and whether it does it well.

All of the reviewers for **arcane** are encouraged to use the full spectrum of scores available, rather than playing it safe and sticking to the middle ground (in this issue we see our first ten, but we've also got a one). We personally query every score, asking the reviewer whether they really think they've got it right in each particular case. So far, we've not been disappointed – a testament to the professional approach that all our reviewers take when testing the games and supplements we give them.

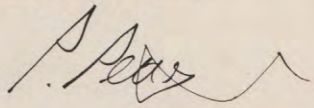
And it is for these reasons that I firmly believe **arcane** is the place to turn to when you want to spend some money on roleplaying kit, and want to know how your money will be best spent. **arcane** is the only roleplaying and collectable card game magazine that presents a comprehensive, authoritative voice on what's out there and whether it's worth your cash. And it is for these reasons that you'll continue to buy new games on the strength of our reviews, while at the same time avoiding others.

Of course, our reviews only take up some 20 percent of our editorial pages. It's our news, comment and features which also, I hope, make the magazine worth buying. And this month we've pulled out all the stops on that front.

Chief among the month's features is our 'top 50 games of all time' 11-page special. This league table of the most popular roleplaying games from 1975 to 1996 has taken months to piece together. You may recall that you, our readers, were asked to compile and send in a list of your favourite ten roleplaying games, and it was these lists that we used to calculate which games were popular, and which systems were less so. I must thank the hundreds and hundreds of you who sent in your lists – they gave us a huge amount of work, but the final top 50 is all the more accurate for it. Find out how the games that you voted for did on page 25.

Other features include a look at how the cinema and film should provide ample inspiration for your roleplaying games (presenting a quite different argument to that expressed by Antony Johnston who said, in **arcane** 9, that we should all be basing our campaigns on soap operas). That starts on page 38. We also take a look at character relationships within a party of adventurers, hoping to provide some solutions to internal conflict (see page 58), and David Cornford has been wading through piles of *Mirage* cards in his efforts to come up with four pages of game-winning combinations for *Magic: The Gathering* (starting on page 54).

I can't sign off without mentioning that this is our Christmas issue. Yes, you may think that Christmas is here a little earlier than usual, but we don't have another issue on the shelves until Friday 27th December, so this was our only chance to squeeze in some Christmas cheer before the festive season kicks in big-time. To get us all in the mood we've got a special comic strip on the back page, and Seymour J Clancy III gets all heated under the collar in our news pages (hot enough to melt snow, in fact). I hope you enjoy them both and, indeed, the rest of this issue. 'Till next month!



Paul Pettengale, Editor

"I must thank the hundreds and hundreds of you who sent in your top-ten favourite RPG lists."

NEWS

News from around the gaming industry brought to you by **arcane** every month.

NEMESIS RELEASED

• The first supplement for *Conspiracy X* is finally here. Read all about *The Greys Sourcebook* on page 11.

SABAT REVEALED

• The first evet stand-alone card set for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* is launched. See page 10.

WIN LOTS OF GAMES

• There are ten copies of *The Settlers of Catan* up for grabs; turn to page 14 to discover how you can win one.

Batt

The Trad

BattleTech is the fourth collectable card game designed by Richard Garfield and released by Wizards of the Coast. Will it be a *Magic* beater?

SATURATION BOMBING
Scrap Saturation Bombing when it is revealed.
Deal 1 damage to one site for each 2 construction above the cost of Saturation Bombing.

COMING SOO

Wizards of the Coast unleashes its eagerly-awaited fourth collectable card game.

The company that started the whole collectable card game industry is about to release the long-delayed CCG based on FASA's *BattleTech* miniatures system.

Set in the 31st century, *BattleTech* depicts a universe constantly at war.

HATCHETMAN HC1-H
SUPPORT: LOGIS
ASSASSIN ASN-21
Jump (-1 attack; +1 initiative)
The uncommon Assassin is coveted for its prodigious jump capability.

Empire of the Fading Suns

Can you unite the last vestiges of humanity and become Emperor?

COMING SOON

The shots here are from the introduction to the game. A demo of *Empire* is due soon at http://www.holist-design.com

Holistic Design, publisher of the *Fading Suns* science fiction RPG (**arcane** 11), is hard at work on a computer strategy game set in the same universe.

Empire of the Fading Suns is set in the period of history leading up to the time of the *Fading Suns* RPG. For half a millennium humanity had been caught in the throes of a new Dark Age, the wonders of greatest civilisation in history squandered and lost. Then a great leader arose, and began to rebuild the glories of the past. Proclaimed Emperor, Vladimir created a great charter, which set out the structure of a new government for humanity, split between the Church, the Noble Houses and the Merchant League. Each was given five sceptres of office, and grudgingly they ceded to Vladimir's rule.

But when, in AD 4550, Vladimir crowned himself with his own hands, he was struck down by unknown powers. Upon his death his great union fell apart as the Houses turned upon each other to fight for the spoils. *Empire of the Fading Suns* puts the player in charge of one of the five Noble Houses struggling for control of the Known Worlds. To succeed you must deal with the complex politics of the rival factions and gain enough votes to be crowned Emperor.

Each group has its own agenda, and all try to gain favour with others through politics, trade, treachery and even warfare, which combine to make *Empire of the Fading Suns* one of the most interesting sounding strategy games to come along in some time.

Empire of the Fading Suns is due to be released in November or December. Look out for a review soon.

Enter the world of Beowulf in Pendragon

The next release from Chaosium for its *Pendragon* system of medieval Europe, *Land of Giants,* describes the lands of Scandinavia at the time of Arthur.

Land of Giants assumes that when the Knights of the Round Table upheld chivalry and honour in England, the mighty warrior Beowulf feasted in the halls of Hrothgar and battled the vicious Grendel for his King. It looks at how the Scandinavian Kingdoms might have existed during the time of Arthur, drawing on the legends of the area.

Included are notes on generating Northman player characters, an examination of Northman customs, culture and religion, maps and a guide to important places and people. The book is designed to allow refs to send their Arthurian PCs to Scandinavia on quests, or run whole campaigns with Thanes and Jarls. The book also features a range of adventures for either type of campaign.

Land of Giants will be released in December. We'll have a full review soon.

Tech: Card Game

Once united by the Star League, the five ruling Houses of the Inner Sphere now struggle with each other for supremacy while fighting off the attacks of the self-exiled Clans. The critical battles in these conflicts are those fought over planets rich in resources or industry, and on these battlefields the BattleMechs rule supreme. Towering robotic fighting machines weighing up to 100 tons and standing 60 or 70' tall, 'Mech cards represent the mighty fighting machines that each player uses to defeat their opponent, Mission cards represent special tactics or battleplans that can give the critical edge in combat, and Command cards represent either resource-producing sites used to build 'Mechs and other Command cards, or special upgrades such as experienced pilots, much-improved armour and so on.

"Whether or not Richard Garfield has managed to produce another winning CCG remains to be seen."

'Mechs are the ultimate weapons of both the Houses and the Clans.

Whereas the *BattleTech* miniatures system enables players to pit small forces of 'Mechs against each other in tactical combat, the card game takes a larger scale view, recreating whole planetary campaigns and emphasising the strategic elements of such a war.

There are three basic types of card available to you in the game – 'Mechs, Missions and Command.

The basic aim of *BattleTech* is to destroy your opponent's ability to fight by successful attacks on his or her Stockpiles (decks). Damage done to the Stockpile forces cards to be discarded from it, and when you run out of cards, you lose.

From what we've seen of the game so far, *BattleTech* certainly seems to be interesting. The mechanics of the game fall roughly in between *Magic: The Gathering* and *Netrunner*, but *BattleTech* seems to be geared towards larger scale games than either. It seems to stick closely to the detailed background of the *BattleTech* universe, thanks no doubt to the involvement of FASA in its development.

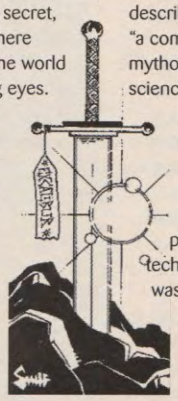
Whether or not Richard Garfield has managed to produce yet another winning collectable card game remains to be seen, however. We'll be bringing you a full review of the finished version of *BattleTech* in the next issue of **arcane**, on sale Friday 27th December.

Warehouse 23

Some things the world just wasn't meant to know.

Steve Jackson Games is putting the finishing touches to what promises to be one of the most interesting *GURPS* sourcebooks ever, *GURPS Warehouse 23*.

Warehouse 23 is the top secret, high-security storage facility where 'they' keep all the things that the world isn't ready for safe from prying eyes. Relics made by mad geniuses, aliens, or gods, books of dark sorceries that could destroy the world, fantastic inventions, impossible substances and more are all packed away inside. On one shelf lies the Ark of the Covenant, while next to it are the unsightly frozen corpses of Martian invaders, and on the shelf below are a dozen working examples of the '100 miles per gallon' carburettor.



Perhaps inspired by the sequence at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where the Ark is locked away in a vast government building, *GURPS Warehouse 23* is described by its author, S John Ross, as "a compendium of 20th century mythology – a collection of weird science, dark sorcery, and shameless lies". Ross has done a phenomenal amount of research for the supplement, involving hundreds of books and articles on everything from mysticism to politics to freight transportation techniques. "Some of the reading was just silly," says Ross. "Some of it was disturbing, like one man's book about what his father went through as part of mind control experiments sponsored by the US Government. Some of it was easy to dismiss, some of it wasn't."

COMING SOON

In addition to details of the warehouse itself, its role in history and a wide variety of its contents, *GURPS Warehouse 23* also includes a timeline, complete with every significant date from the book and *GURPS Illuminati*, rules for *Black Magic* and *Mind Control*, and suggestions for integrating the warehouse and its contents into a campaign. Of course, the book should also provide a vast number of adventure ideas, some based on fact, others purely fictional. As Ross says, "Truth is stranger than fiction because fiction has to make sense to the author. Truth doesn't have anyone to answer to."

GURPS Warehouse 23 is due to be released from Steve Jackson Games in December. The company is also set to release a second edition of the *GURPS Illuminati* book in the same month, which will update the information of the original release and also tie in with *Warehouse 23*.

Look out for full reviews of both of these books in **arcane** as soon as we get our hands on them.

And besides...

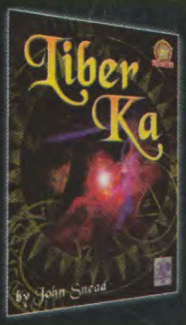
TSR announces new Marvel collectable dice game

TSR, one-time publisher of the *Marvel Super Heroes* roleplaying game, has announced that it will be releasing a brand new collectable dice game based on the successful comic's popular characters.

The Marvel Super Dice Game should be released in March 1997, and will feature everyone's favourite superheroes and villains, such as Spiderman, Wolverine, The Hulk, Dr Doom and Venom. No details about the format or rules of the game have been announced yet, but we'll bring you more news (and a full review) as soon as we can.

Liber Ka

Also due to be released soon from Chaosium is a new book for the *Nephilim* roleplaying game, which casts the players as immortal beings who have existed for thousands of years. The system caused something of a stir when it was first released because of its widely publicised integration of real-world occult principles and theory into its background and setting.



The new book, *Liber Ka*, features a completely new and expanded sorcery system for *Nephilim*. Chaosium has not yet stated whether this too will be based on real-world traditions and mysticism, or whether instead it will be an entirely fictional book. Either way, *Liber Ka* should provide any referees running *Nephilim* with a whole new range of options and powers to include in their campaigns.

Liber Ka is due to be released in January. As ever, **arcane** will bring you a full review as soon as we get hold of a copy of the game.

And besides...

Imperium Games back on track

Contrary to the wide variety of rumours flying around the Internet recently, Imperium Games has *not* closed down, and the future of the recently released fourth edition of the *Traveller* science fiction roleplaying game (**arcane** 10, 9/10 – see page 53 if you missed it) is as solid as ever.

Imperium Games has, however, undergone some changes in its management structure recently, which have been designed to enable the company's staff to concentrate more on the development and production of support material for the game, while freeing them from the business aspects of the game.

Now everything has settled down, though, and fans of *Traveller* will be pleased to hear that the company is making an effort to get back on schedule with the planned line of supplements and sourcebooks for the game. The first book, *Starships*, should be available by the time you read this, with the second, *Aliens*, due for release at the end of November. In addition to that, Imperium's first issue of the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* magazine, *JTAS* 25, will be published at the same time.

In the meantime, Imperium Games' address and phone numbers have changed. The company can now be contacted at:
001 310 275 9934 (phone)
001 310 275 9322 (fax)
imperiumGames@idcnet.com (e-mail)

GURPS Compendium II

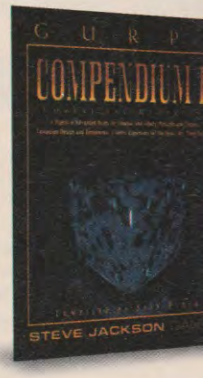
The second *GURPS* collection is on its way.

Yet another new release due soon from Steve Jackson Games – an extremely busy company at the moment, by all accounts – the *GURPS Compendium II* does for campaigns and combat what the first *Compendium* (**arcane** 10) did for character generation, collecting together an abundance of rules and options from a variety of previously released *GURPS* sourcebooks.

Compiled from dozens of books released in the past eight years, including several that are now out of print, the *GURPS Compendium II* promises to offer *GURPS* referees a wealth of advice on running their games, including tips on handling problems in play, both those common to all roleplaying games and some specific to *GURPS*. In addition, the book includes expanded rules for all aspects of combat, injury and illness, including mass combat systems, spaceship rules and more.

The *GURPS Compendium II* should be released by Steve Jackson Games in November. We'll bring you a full review in the next issue of **arcane** – out Friday 27th December.

Learn how to fight in just about every way imaginable, with the ultimate guide to *GURPS* combat antics.



The Sabbat

The dark side of Kindred society makes an appearance in *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*.

Perhaps inspired by the success of the stand-alone expansion sets released for *Magic: The Gathering*, *Ice Age* and *Mirage* (**arcane** 13), Wizards of the Coast is just about to release the first stand-alone expansion for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* (formally known as *Jyhad*), the card game based on White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* roleplaying game (**arcane** 1).

The new stand-alone expansion set for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* looks rather sexy, and it's called *Sabat*.

COMING SOON

In *Vampire*, the Sabbat is the dark society of vampires, opposed to the Camarilla. Whereas the clans of Camarilla hold to the self-imposed principles of The Masquerade, in order to hide their existence from humanity, and struggle to control the bestial sides of their natures, the clans of the Sabbat reject these principles. Sabbat vampires make no particular effort to disguise their existence from humans, who they see as little more than cattle, and revel in the dark side of their natures.

The Sabbat expansion for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* introduces the clans of the Sabbat to the game in 28-card booster packs. Sabbat cards can be used on their own (although you do need a copy of the *V:TES* rules), or combined with standard *Vampire: TES* cards to pit the vampires of the Camarilla against their ancient foes.

As well as twisted 'antitribu' versions of the seven clans of the Camarilla, *The Sabbat* also introduces three new clans, The Lasombra, The Tzimisce and The Pander, and three new disciplines, Dementation (the power to induce madness), Obtenebration (the magical control of

"Sabbat vampires revel in the dark side of their natures."

Nemesis:

The Greys Sourcebook

Discover how little you really know of the truth behind *Conspiracy X*.

After some delays and production problems, New Millennium Entertainment has just released the first sourcebook for its excellent *Conspiracy X* roleplaying game of modern-day horror (**arcane** 7).

Nemesis: The Greys Sourcebook takes an in-depth look at this mysterious alien race. Despite being the most commonly sighted by the general public, with thousands of reports of UFOs, abductions and horrifying experiments all involving 'little grey men', little is truly understood of these creatures, their technology or their purposes.

Aegis, the organisation to which *Conspiracy X* player characters belong, has itself been watching and countering Grey activity on Earth for decades, but as *Nemesis* reveals, much of what has been theorised about them is completely wrong. Even the Black Book, the Greys' closest allies on Earth, have been mislead.

They walk among us – the Greys are unveiled in *The Greys Sourcebook*.

Featuring the truth behind the Greys' activities for the first time, as well as new rules for their unique telepathic abilities and technology, and details of the even stranger 'Blues' – Greys which have been genetically engineered with Terran DNA – *Nemesis: The Greys Sourcebook* looks to be a must-but for any *Conspiracy X* referee. Watch out for the full review in next month's issue of **arcane**.

New Millennium Entertainment is also hard at work on the next range of supplements to be released for the game, which includes *Cryptozoology, Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, The Aegis Handbook, Forsaken Rites: The Supernatural Sourcebook* and *The Black Book*. More details of all these books will appear in future issues of **arcane**, together with full reviews when they are released.

shadows and darkness) and finally Vicissitude (the ability to sculpt living flesh into new forms).

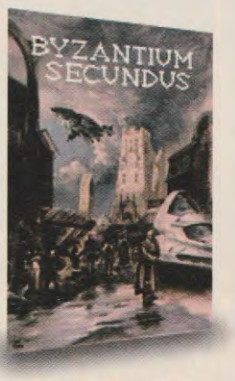
Each booster pack comes with a small rules pamphlet, explaining the differences between Sabbat and Camarilla vampires, some special new rules for Sabbat vampires, and how to successfully integrate both into the same game. Look out for a full review in the next issue of **arcane**.

Soul Burn
Strike: 1R damage
This damage cannot be prevented by cards that require Fortitude.
For the remainder of this round, the opposing minion cannot inflict damage with weapons.
: As above, but for 2R damage.
Illus. Craig Maher

COMING SOON

Byzantium Secundus

The capital of the *Fading Suns* universe revealed.



As well as the *Empire of the Fading Suns* computer game, Holistic Design is also forging ahead with its range of supplements and sourcebooks for the *Fading Suns* RPG. Due first is *Byzantium Secundus*, a sourcebook detailing the most important planet in the Known Worlds, the capital and seat of the Emperor.

Byzantium Secundus is a hotbed of political intrigue and deadly plots, and the decisions made here affect the future of humanity. Royal Ambassadors, Fathers of the Church, Merchant Princes, Alien Envoys and other groups struggle for the favour of the Emperor, all dedicated to their own causes. Although the Emperor has a semblance of control over the Known Worlds, dark forces are at work beneath the surface of the government, and the universe could be ripped apart by war at any time. The *Byzantium Secundus* book promises many hints of future events in the *Fading Suns* universe, together with new character roles, equipment, full maps of the world and a complete adventure set there. We should be bringing you a full review in the next issue of **arcane**.

Also in development are a number of other books including *Forbidden Lore: Technology, Nobles: Lords of the Known Worlds*, the *Fading Suns Player's Companion* and *Dark Between the Stars*. We'll bring you news of these soon.

Famous for 15 Minutes

Recently, Paul has been playing us all a new CD entitled *Elementalz* by British hip-hoppers The Brotherhood. It's got one of those 'Parental Guidance – Explicit Lyrics' labels on the cover, and so we initially expected considerable swearing and steeled ourselves to withstand an onslaught of naughty words. However, we now believe that the warning label had in fact been stuck on the cover principally because of an early reference in the lyrics to roleplaying games.

The first track starts off with them all talking – a bit like Pink Floyd on *Dark Side of the Moon*. But when the song actually kicks in, the first lyric rings perfectly clear for all to hear – "So this is Dungeons & Dragons."

It all gets a bit difficult to follow after that, but we are happy enough to know that we can now count 'one mixed race, one black, one yid – the power of a pyramid' in the D20 club. And anyway, it's a cool album which marries American derived music to deliberately English lyrics with plenty of rudeness and references to people such as Eric Cantona. We would even suggest that you go out right now and buy it – but what are we, music critics all of a sudden? No, all we want is incidents where gaming is referred to in places where a lot of people will come across it. So, keep an eye out for any quirky roleplaying references and send your reports to us at the following address:

15 Minutes, arcane, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW

Or e-mail us at:

arcane@futurenet.co.uk

Now, we'd love to offer you **arcane** T-shirts for you to wear to the disco, but we haven't got any more left. Still, we'll find you something.

Fanzine watch

Three more 'zines with a vampiric slant...

The fanzine scene, it would seem, is thriving, and this month we've been sent three new issues (though no new titles) to ponder. First off is the third issue of the grisly *Tomb*, the Vampire Quarterly. Recommended for mature readers only, it contains vampire-related fiction and features on *Vampire: The Masquerade, Vampire: The Eternal Struggle, NecroHunter* and *Kindred: The Embrace.* Not the kind of thing you'd want to be reading last thing at night, admittedly, but jolly good during the daylight hours.

The 'zine's editor, Morien Jones, has managed to arrange a special offer for all **arcane** readers who'd like a copy of *Tomb* issue 3. Wizards of the Coast has supplied him with copies of the ultra-rare (as in, you can't buy it in starter packs or boosters) Dan Murdock card for *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle.* Mention **arcane** when you send of your cheque for £2.50 (£3 in Europe, £3.50 in the US, £4 elsewhere) to Morien Jones, 40 Hawk Close, Abbeydale, Gloucester GL4 8NE, and one of these collectable cards is yours.

Also on the darker side of fanzinedom is *The Kindred Network,* a

support fanzine for The Kindred Network society, a group of *World of Darkness* players (in all its forms) who keep in contact with each other across the country. Admittedly, much of the 'zine is only going to be of interest to you if you're a member of the society, but still, there are nuggets of information in here which all *WoD* players may find interesting. The magazine is free to all Kindred Network members (write to: The Kindred Network, PO Box 401, Stirchley, Telford TF3 1WN for details of how you can join).

Finally, we've also been sent issue eight of *Roll Your Own,* a 'zine that we've not seen for some while. Those of you that know it will be pleased to hear that the quality hasn't diminished at all – it's still a bloody fine read. This issue covers combat-related software in *Cyberpunk 2020,* a feature on the *Sabbat,* a feature on insanity in roleplaying games (which is not at all similar to the feature on that same

subject which appeared in **arcane** 11) and a host of other mixed copy. It costs a mere quid, making it one of the best value fanzines around. Send off your monies to: Mark Brassington, 61 Lord Nelson Street, Sneinton, Nottingham NG2 4AJ.

Oh, and just as we're about to close the mag, we've received the third issue of the most excellent *Warpstone,* the fanzine for players of WHFRP. The £3 asking price may seem a bit steep, it's worth it. Write to: *Warpstone,* John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5. And a year's subscription is available for a reasonable £9.

Seymour J Clancy III's Christmas Outing

It is Christmas once again and, much to his chagrin, a place where gamers meet has opened down Seymour's street . . .

GAMES
WOW
AHH!
OOH!
AGIC
The Gathering
DRAT! DAMSELFLIES! DIDYMIUM! DIFFRACTOMETERS. ETC...
CALL OF CTHULHU SOUNDS LIKE FUN
GAMES
Santa wanted
FOR OUR STORE (TO MAKE THE TOTS COME BACK FOR MORE)
SO THIS IS WHERE THESE GAY-YEMS ARE PLAYED THOSE THAT AH DESPI-YES AH SHALL DESTROY THIS WICKED TRADE RAAHT BEFORE THAY AY-YES
AH HAVE A GRATE EXPEDIENCE IN THESE MATTER-IALS, SUCH AS D&D AND OTHER GAY-YEMS MO EPHEMERALS AND SEEING AS IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME. I'LL EVEN SPEAK TO THE KIDS IN RHYME
THO MAKIN IT SCAN MA BE A LITTLE DIFFICULT
THE MANS QUITE OBVIOUSLY A BUFFOON. BUT WE MUST HAVE A SANTA THIS AFTERNOON
SANTA AT
PLEASE CAN I HAVE D&D?
THE STARS WARS RPG FOR ME
WILL YOU PLAY COWBOYS & INDIANS WITH US INSTEAD THEN, FATHER CHRISTMAS?
YES! WE CAN PLUNDER THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINE AND THEN ELOPE WITH OUR NEW F WEALTH TO A PEACEFUL LIFE IN S AMERICA, ESCAPING BY WAY O THE PANAMANIAN ISTHMUS.
WHILE I'D LIKE TO PLAY SHADOWRUN
JUST LIKE BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID ER. DID
OKAY. I'LL PLAY. BUT I WANT TO BE BUTCH
AYE. WE WOULD LIKE THAT VERY MUCH
YOU SHOULD BE SO LUCKY, DUCKY
NOW YOU DONT WANT TO PLAY THESE GAMES AT ALL HOW ABOUT A CRICKET BAT AND BALL?
BUT IT'S TOO COLD AND DARK FOR SUMMER SPORTS - UNLESS, I GUESS, YOU'RE AN AUSTRALIAN OF SORTS
YOU SHOULD PLAY SPORT FOR YOUR FROLICKS. THESE RPGS ARE A LOAD OF BOLICKS.
THE AY-END

GURPS Autoduel 2nd Edition

Succumb to your road rage in the grim and dark future of Autoduel America.

Based on the phenomenally successful world of Steve Jackson Games' *Car Wars* miniatures rules, *GURPS Autoduel 2nd Edition* is set to return the popular *Autoduel* world to print after a long absence.

The book has been completely revised, and allows for full roleplaying campaigns in the world of *Car Wars*. For a start the history of *Autoduel America* has been updated with the ten years' worth of future events since *GURPS Autoduel* was originally released, and integrated into a step-by-step timeline of the future, which also includes a mini-atlas of North America.

Likewise, the vehicle designs rules have been completely overhauled to make them compatible with the new *GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition* book (see page 70), and include more detail and options than ever before. Players can choose from a wide variety of vehicle types, from subcompacts and station wagons to motorcycles, off-road trikes, heavy trucks and buses, and customise them with special tyres, suspension systems, engines, weapons and accessories to create the ultimate fighting vehicle for their particular character's style.

Complementing the vehicles section are complete rules for generating *GURPS* characters for *Autoduel America,* complete with unique new advantages and disadvantages, enabling you to create any *Car Wars* character type, from arena champions to policemen. *GURPS Autoduel* will be released by Steve Jackson Games in December. Look out for a full **arcane** review pretty soon.

Ani-Mayhem

Animé madness hits the collectable card game market.

Soon to be released in the UK by Pioneer, *Ani-Mayhem* is a collectable card game based on a number of hit Japanese video series.

Apparently the world is collapsing, and players must throw their teams of Animé characters into a frantic search for valuable items scattered by the upheavals. Players can choose to create coherent teams from a single series, such as the popular *Bubblegum Crisis* (see page 64 for an in-depth look at *Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game* from R Talsorian), or mix and match heroes from different shows. To make things more interesting, your team faces a variety of Disaster cards which must be overcome by force of arms or more subtle means, including everything from mad combat robots to stubborn traffic police.

Attacking Laser Pistol
+2 Attack.
Discard after 6 uses or reload.
"Surrender now, or I'll have to blast you, and that will really hurt!"

Ani-Mayhem certainly sounds like it's going to be fairly over-the-top stuff, and the cards we've seen all feature great stills from the shows that make up the basic set, so it's sure to look good. For a full review, look out for **arcane** 15.

From snail-mail to e-mail

Crasiworld launches its play-by-mail games on the Net.

Crasimoff's World is one of the most popular play-by-mail games ever created, so it's good news that the game's current runner, Crasiworld, has introduced it to the Internet as a Web-based game. There are to be four separate games running at any one time, each accommodating 1,000 players. It remains faithful to the style of the PBM version, so each turn is quickly downloaded from the Net on to your computer, and then you e-mail in your order sheet. This makes it a cheap game to play compared with most MUDs, where you're using your phone line for as long as you're playing the game.

Crasiworld is offering all **arcane** readers a chance to sample the on-line version of *Crasimoff's World* for free (usually you pay a fixed rate per turn). If you point your Web browser at `http.//www.crasiworld.com` and fill in the on-line forms, you'll get a start-up and your first three turns for nothing. If you want more information, or if you'd like to find out about the snail-mail version of *Crasimoff's World,* write to: Crasiworld, FREEPOST, Thornton Cleveleys, Blackpool, FY5 3BR. And don't forget to mention that **arcane** gave you the tip-off.

The world's friendliest convention

Gaelcon, the Republic of Ireland's premier roleplaying convention was held on the last weekend in October. This was the sixth convention that the Irish Games Association has organised. Highlights of the weekend included opportunities to meet the guest of honour, John Tynes of Pagan Publishing, whose long career in gaming has also included working for Wizards of the Coast and Daedalus Games. Other guests included Chris Williams of R Talsorian, Janice Sellers of Chaosium, German board game designer Reiner Knizia, Andy Chambers and Aly Morrison from Games Workshop among many others.

Although a small convention by international standards (about 300 people attended), *Gaelcon* is one of the best and is always attended by enthusiastic people. There were opportunities to take part in all kinds of gaming, including *Magic* tournaments, roleplaying, board gaming and LARP.

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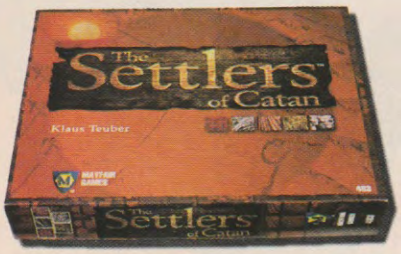
WIN THE BEST BOARD GAME IN THE WORLD!

We've got copies of *The Settlers of Catan* to give away, and some RPGs besides...



"If ever there was a game that would introduce friends or families to the joys of gamesplaying, this is it."

You will have noticed, we hope, that we're giving our first ten out of ten to a game this month (we say so on the cover, after all). We thought long and hard about it, but we had to come to the conclusion that *The Settlers of Catan* is, well, perfect as a board game. You can find out exactly what we thought of it on page 62, where Steve Faragher bubbles over with enthusiasm.

As you can imagine, we can't encourage you enough to rush out and buy a copy of *Settlers* as soon as you're able. But in the meantime we've teamed up with the wonderful people at Mayfair Games in the States to offer ten of you the chance to win a copy of the game, thus saving yourself a not inconsiderable £25. And then, even if your name isn't dragged out of the box for a copy of *Settlers*, you could still be in luck. As runners-up prizes we're offering six people a copy of the excellent *Chill* horror roleplaying game, together with the *Vampires* and the *Veil of Flesh* supplements. Coo.

So, a question for you to answer...

WIN! COPIES OF THE SETTLERS OF CATAN

Q What's the name of th German version of *Th Settlers of Catan?*

(And a hint: you can find the answer in this issue of arcane.)

Die rules:

1. Your entry shall be here by Friday Janua 10th, or it shall be stolen by the robber.
2. If you work for Mayfair Games or Future Publishing you're not allowed to play.
3. Try to build more than one settlement o hex and you're disqualified.
4. The editor controls all the ports.

You can read the review of *The Settlers of Catan* on page 62 of this issue.

IT'S *SETTLERS*, AND IT'S ABSOLUTELY GREAT

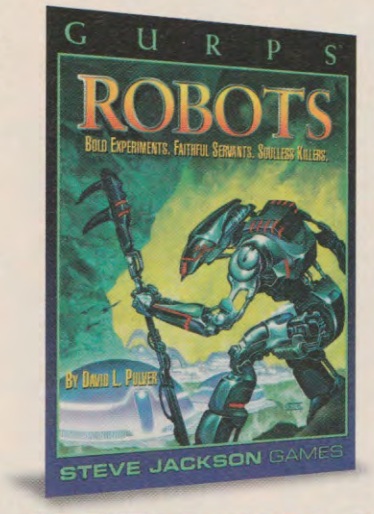
Reign of Steel

A new campaign for *GURPS Robots* on the way.

Still more news from Steve Jackson Games (what is it feeding its game designers these days?) comes with the announcement that *Reign of Steel*, a new campaign setting and worldbook designed for use with *GURPS Robots*, is currently in advanced playtest.

Written by David L Pulver, author of both *GURPS Robots* and the new *GURPS Vehicles: 2nd Edition* (see page 70), *Reign of Steel* is set in a post-apocalyptic world with more than a hint of *Terminator* about it. In *Reign of Steel* the last desperate vestiges of humanity fight a vicious war for survival against powerful Artificial Intelligences and their devious robots minions.

Players take on the roles of rebels fighting with the resistance, and must pit their wits, skill and cunning against the overwhelming might of the robot war machines built by the AIs. Outgunned and outnumbered, their success or failure can spell extinction for the human race. Well, there's nothing like a little bit of pressure and stress to bring out the very best in people...



COMING SOON

GURPS Reign of Steel is due to be released early next year by Steve Jackson Games, alongside a re-printing of the *GURPS Robots* book, which is currently out of print. We'll bring you more news as we get it, and, of course, the review will shortly follow.

An apology Curious Pastimes has contacted us, complaining about the alleged theft of AA road signs by visitors to its *Renewal* LARP event, as reported in our 'I was a Live-Action Roleplaying Virgin' feature in **arcane** 13. We would like to point out that the alleged theft is unsubstantiated hearsay, and that we did not wish to imply that Curious Pastimes ran its event incorrectly, or to put any **arcane** readers off attending future Curious Pastimes events. We really are sorry guys.

COMPO WINNERS

Gone to my baby's head

The following five people win a copy of Monocle Games' first board game, *City of Chaos*: Heidi Kaye of Bath, David Mcloughlin of Grantham, David Storey of Penicuik, Olivier Vermaut of Neuville-en-Ferrain and Alison Warren of Hayes.

No, I have a headache

The goblin that Cuckoo's Nest Enterprises 'kindly' provided as a competition prize is finally packing his bags. He's on his way to Guildford to be with Sally Kentfield. So, if Mia Hart-Allison or anybody else really wants one, call Ian Thomas of CNE on 01554 749361.

You really don't have to do this to impress me

The winners of Hodder Headline Audiobooks' versions of the *Star Wars* trilogy are: Chris Diaper of Brantham, Lee Lomax of the Wirral and Wendy Snell of Bury St Edmunds.

There's mystical energy in them thar hills!

Rolefile Games supported the release of its first RPG, *Leystorm: The Dominion*, by sending us two copies to give to you. These will go to John Constable of Cambridge and James Ramirez of Hove. Enjoy.

Bronze Age Terror

A new play-by-mail game takes you back to the Bronze Age.

It may seem a little strange, but *Assassin* is a PBM system in which all the players are assassins who explore, fight and generally adventure their way through the world's oldest civilisations. Quite why they have to be assassins, rather than, say, clerics or monks isn't quite made clear, but one commendable element of this new game from Bronze Age Games is that it aims to educate its audience as it entertains them. And that's not all that usual in the PBM world.

Because the game is based of historical fact, rather than a fictional world with its own history, *Assassin* can afford the luxury of mixing in historical data which, its authors hope, will be remembered by the players. So, you can perhaps think of this game as a history lesson that's fun (and contains lots of assassins, obviously). Turns, which are processed fortnightly, are £2.50 each. For more information, write to: Bronze Age Games, PO Box 81, Nuneaton CV10 9YS.

Magic card world record broken

Charity benefits from card sale.

Would you pay £500 for a single *Magic* card? Well that's exactly what somebody did at last month's Gaelcon. The man – who wishes to remain anonymous – paid £500 for a non-mint, *Alpha* edition Black Lotus which had been donated to Gaelcon's charity auction by Jhared Earle, of Wizards of the Coast UK, from his private collection. While this price shatters all previous records for a single *Magic* card, it's important to remember that it was paid at a charity auction. The buyer said: "I know it's not worth that much money, but I was looking to buy something and make a sizeable donation to charity." The auction raised £3,000 to help sick children.

next month in arcane

THEY'RE out to GET YOU

The world has gone *X-Files* mad, but how can you use conspiracy theory and investigative scenarios to build a tension-fraught campaign? In the next issue of arcane we look at how modern-day horror games such as *Call of Cthulhu*, *Conspiracy X* and *Don't Look Back* should be run.

It's a mad, mad world

Plato suggested that philosophers should govern society, and next month Phil Masters suggests the job should be left to magicians. Is he crazy? Find out in **arcane** 15.

We want a WORD with YOU

Al Capone was up to it, the Krays dabbled in it and even Frank Sinatra was linked to it. Next month we take a look at the underworld goings-on of organised crime, and examine how you can use it within your games.

All this, **PLUS TWO FREE *VISIONS* CARDS FOR *MAGIC: THE GATHERING*,** and lots more.

arcane 15 will be on sale on Friday 27th December

To make sure of your copy of arcane every month either subscribe using the card in this issue or fill in this handy form and give it to your newsagent.

Dear newsagent, please reserve a lovely copy of arcane for me every month.

Name .....

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QUEST

Rules, set-up and first turn
FREE
WORTH £5.00

Rules, set-up and first 3 turns
FREE
WORTH £10.00

MONSTER ISLAND

You're washed up on the beach of a beautiful tropical island. Or is it? When your travel guide fails to turn up you soon realise this is a one way ticket. But don't hang around - you're being watched.

KJC GAMES
PLAY BY MAIL SPECIALISTS
No.1

A new dimension in comput
role playing.

**A great fantas
adventure through
world of powerfu
gods, strange magi
and dream cities: C
QUEST mystical beast
guarding untol
treasures. Take up you
spell books and swor
and begin your Ques**

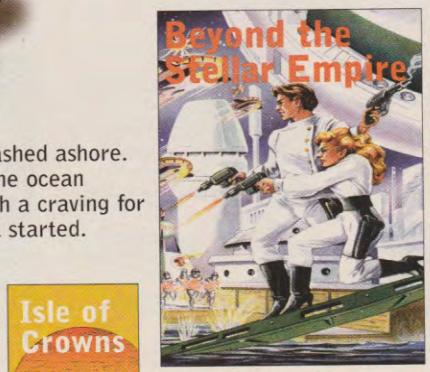
- Select your party of adventurers from the 16 character types.
- Seek your fortune in the wilderness.
- Explore the depths of the earth
- Find employment in the towns and cities.
- Research new spells and magic
- Gain favour with the gods throu prayer and great deeds.
- Do battle against the creatures of darkness and other players.
- Full-time programmer continua adding new features.

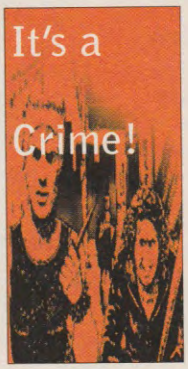
Special Features

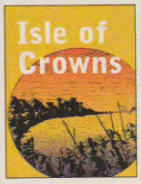
- Hundreds of Players to interact with.
- Detailed graphic maps each tur
- Town, cities, caves and monster to be discovered.
- Thousands of monsters to fight.
- Free player produced newslette
- Vast multi-level dungeons to explore.
- Eight powerful Gods to worship
- Hundreds of items to buy and s

You think your troubles are over when you're washed ashore. Oh no! With your favourite sword lost beneath the ocean waves and a 12 foot Octopaw staring at you, with a craving for your eyeballs as hors d'oeuvres, they've only just started. Welcome to Monster Island...

- Seven different Monster Races to choose from.
- Make your own weapons and armour.
- Hundreds of unique treasure items.
- Laser printed terrain map each turn.
- Magic and Voodoo.
- Cave delving and graveyard looting.
- Trading post, far inns and NPC races.







The World of Play by Mail

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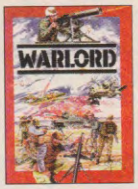

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Is it written?

this month we ask whether roleplayers are being fooled by the rules... or ruled by the fools.

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

IT ALL MADE PERFECT SENSE AT THE TIME. You dreamt that you were at some sort of enormous games convention, pushing your way through a teaming mass of roleplayers in search of the bar. A stranger accosts you and asks if you want to join her *AD&D* campaign – in the way that people often do in dreams.

Well, you don't want your dream to turn into a nightmare, so you explain politely that you don't care very much for *D&D*. The character classes are too restrictive, the combat system is not very exciting and the alignment rules are too goody-goody. Or at any rate, chaotic goody-goody.

To your surprise, the dream ref totally agrees with you.

"Sure," she says reassuringly. "But we don't actually play it like that. I've written up a new percentage-based combat system. We only use character classes as guidelines, and we've given up alignment altogether. Heck, we sometimes allow evil paladins."

You are about to ask what on earth this game has to do with *D&D* when you hear another group of gamers talking about *Call of Cthulhu*. This time, you are very enthusiastic because you regard HP Lovecraft as one of the great prose stylists of the 20th century. But when you mention Eldritch Shoggoth gods and Three Lobed Burning Eyes they look at you as if you are a gibbering lunatic. (There are a lot of gibbering lunatics in *CoC*, after all.)

"Who on earth's Lovecraft?" one of them asks.

"I'm sorry," you reply. "I thought you were talking about *Call of Cthulhu.*"

"Yes," he says. "But we run non-mythos *Cthulhu*. We don't use the monsters and cults from the book, or any of that 1920s rubbish. My *Cthulhu* is located in the 24th century, in a setting loosely based on the *Aliens* movies."

You decide to give up on this conversation, and instead wander over to a table where a group of people are playing *Feng Shui*. To your immense disappointment this turns out not to be a game about rearranging people's officer furniture, but rather, an over-the-top spoof on Hong Kong martial arts movies.

And a damned fine game it is too, with much leaping through plate glass windows into swimming pools full of uzi-wielding ninja. As you watch the game, you notice something. Although the character sheets have a fair quantity of numbers on them – car fixing skills, chi ratings, and even in one case a special ability in cooking noodles – no-one seems to pay any attention to them. Only the character's gun skill, his martial arts skill and his initiative rating ever seem to come up in the game. The players are having so much fun that it seems churlish to comment on this, so you go and look over the shoulders of some dedicated *Traveller* players instead.

"Is it not written in rulebooks that thou shalt ignore those aspects of the game which you don't like?"

Their character sheets are covered with even more numbers than the Hong Kong Phooeys', and you know from experience that *Traveller* characters take a little while to role up. But for the four or five hours you watch for (you know how time is completely muddled up in dreams) you do not see a single person so much as glance at the sheet. They are far too interested in what the referee and the other players are saying.

Suddenly, a very old man appears alongside you. He looks a bit like Alec Guiness and something like Billy Connolly.

"What is the meaning of this dream?" you ask.

"Why should any of this surprise you, my son?" he replies. "Is it not written in every rulebook in the world that thou shalt ignore those aspects of the game which you don't like? These players are doing what every gamer in the world does: picking out the bits of the game that they like and ignoring the rest; taking an idea they like and building a new background around it. I've seen people run games which started out as *Rolemaster*, got mixed up with *Toon*, and ended up as something better than either."

"Better than *Toon?*" you ask in complete amazement.

"Certainly," he said. "For surely the best game is the one which most aptly suits you and your gaming group?"

Just then, your alarm clock goes off, and you wake up to the sound of Michael Heseltine ranting on the *Today* programme. In the cold light of day, the flaw in the Old Man's arguments are only too clear.

If people were really ignoring and rewriting the rules of their games, then, of course, they wouldn't spend huge amounts of money on rulebooks in the first place.

Would they?

Ed's Comment

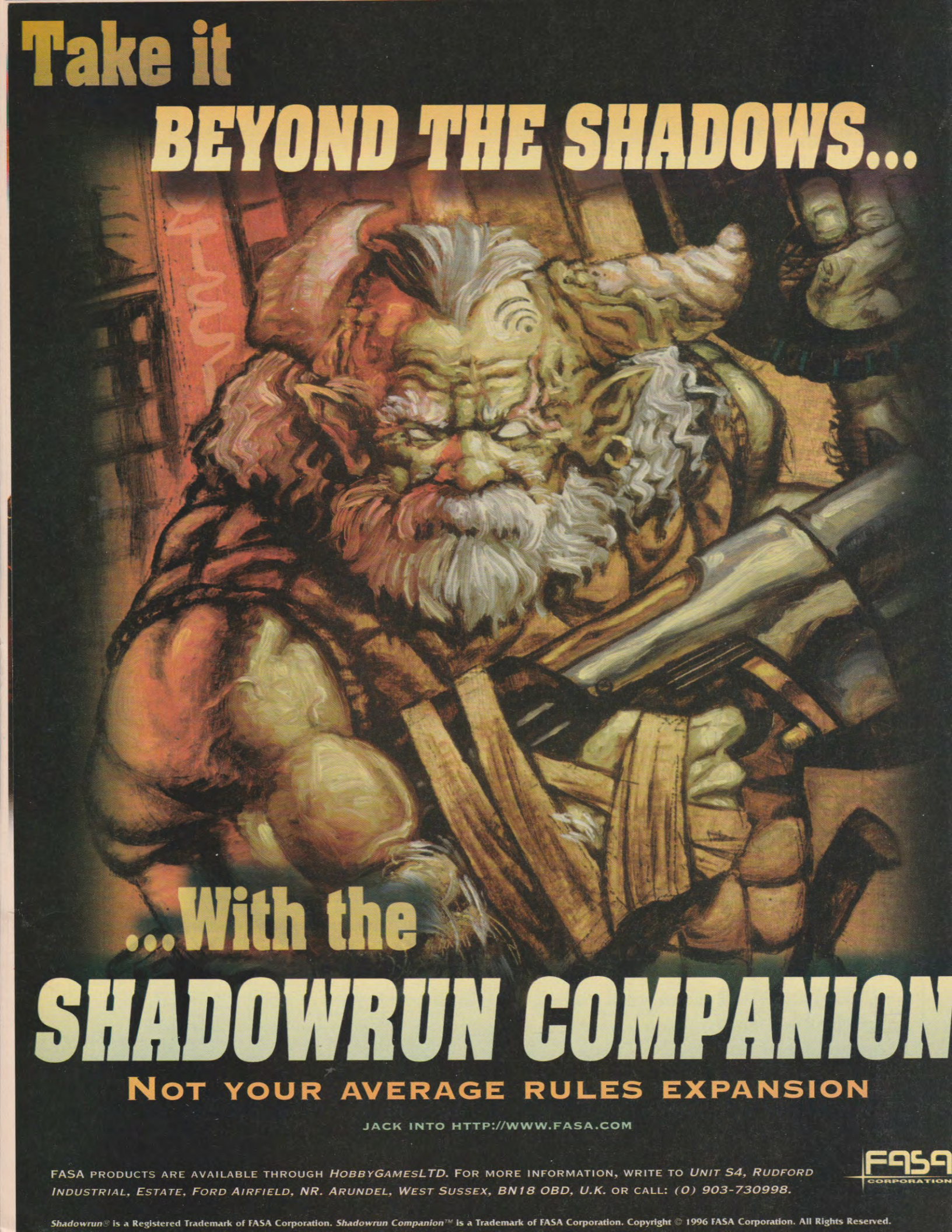
I don't think there are many roleplaying groups that don't alter the way they play their games in some way. Rulebooks are, as we've said so many times before in the pages of **arcane**, little more than a guide: it's up to you what you do with your chosen system and how you decide to play it. This doesn't just apply to the game background, but the rules themselves; most groups find that a particular rule doesn't seem quite right, and so they change it, creating a house rule that suits their style of play much better than the original rule. We shouldn't feel guilty about this, or think that in changing the rules we're breaking the system somehow – after all, making your own changes to the game you're playing is all part of the fun of roleplaying.

Equally, if you join a group of players who have been playing a certain system for some time, you can't expect to play exactly the same game as you have played before, even if it is the same title. Sound confusing? By this I mean that if you've played *Call of Cthulhu* a certain way for years, and then you join another *Call of Cthulhu* group, there's no way that you can expect to pick up the game and play as you always have done – you've got to adjust to the new group's style of play. Again, this is part of the fun in roleplaying; it's all about discovery and diversification. There are a finite number of games around to choose from, but an infinite number of ways to play them.

AND WHAT ABOUT YOU? Have you played any particularly strange versions of games that we all know well? If so, let us know about it. Write to: Scribblings, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW

HANGOVER An industry source has revealed to us, upon reading this column prior to publication, that its source of inspiration can only be a particularly bad hangover that Andrew was suffering from at the Gaelcon convention in Dublin. This true then, Andrew?

Take it BEYOND THE SHADOWS...



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Feeble excuses

Are you one of those unreliable scoundrels who doesn't turn up to roleplaying sessions, or even call to let your referee know? You are? Well in that case listen up, because **Stuart Moses** from Croydon is talking to you.

HOW TO DEAL WITH MISSING PLAYERS, PART ONE... There are numerous ways of dealing with a character who's player has failed to turn up to a session. For instance, how about giving that character to an experienced player in the group to roleplay as a second character for the evening? That usually works well.

IT'S SUNDAY AFTERNOON, NORMALLY the day would seem to go on forever. Today is different. Today you are roleplaying. You are sitting around the table, your referee has pencils, rulebooks and dice at the ready, all you need are the people you usually play with. So you sit there expectantly and wait. And wait. This is what I want to get on my soapbox about – people who don't turn up to roleplaying sessions and people who don't even bother to let you know.

Roleplaying isn't easy, I acknowledge that. It takes effort, it takes commitment. But it's like life, the more you put in, the more you get out of it. Things that are easy to achieve are rarely worth doing. My dream is that I should get together with a bunch of roleplayers who want as much from my favourite hobby as I do. Is this too much to ask? Apparently so. One of the main advantages collectable card games have over roleplaying is that you don't need the same people every time you play.

It's not always possible to play at the same time every week – some of us do get invited to parties, go out to the pub, or perhaps want to watch something on television. But if you can't make it, then tell the person who is running the campaign as soon as possible. That way the people who do turn up won't have to miss out. There are various ways to make up for your absence, but these solutions work best if the referee is given plenty of time to think about it. They can even work to the advantage of the story – a non-roleplaying example of this was when Gillian Anderson was unable to turn up to play her character in *The X-Files* because she was having a baby *(a reasonable excuse, I would've thought – Ed)*. Because she let the producers know in time they were able to work in a new plot thread, and the whole story took a direction that it would never have done otherwise.

If someone can't make your game, then try writing the character out for that particular session, though this does need some explaining. Imagine if Kirk couldn't make it one Sunday, but failed to tell anyone. There the Enterprise is, flying into the neutral Zone where it's attacked.

"What shall we do, Captain?" asks Sulu, only for the question to be met with total silence.

"Apparently he's gone to a barbecue," Spock replies.

"Well, he could have at least let us know." Sulu is not impressed.

Another solution is that you give another person the character. I know continuity isn't perfect in roleplaying games, but characters in these situations suddenly become brave and ready to do potentially fatal things for no apparent reason. Imagine *The X-Files* if Scully was played by someone else.

Mulder: "Scully, did you see that UFO go past?"

Scully: "Yes."

Mulder: "And that werewolf?"

Scully: "Yes."

Mulder: "Oh, you've changed rather a lot since last Sunday's session."

Scully: "Yeah. The person that usually plays me is staying home to watch *Babylon 5* and couldn't be bothered to tell the referee."

The reasons people can't make roleplaying sessions are many. The excuses for not telling someone if you can't make it are none. It's polite. It's common courtesy. It's what makes us able to live in a society with others. And before you start thinking I'm asking the impossible, then maybe you're right. I'm human and have failings, too. You see, recently I got a girlfriend, and not everyone is sympathetic to the idea of four or five men sitting in a room pretending to be vampires, but I'm working on converting her. What disappoints me about myself is my inability to do what I think is right. So recently it's been me that's been invited to barbecues and parties – though I've yet to stay in and watch TV. I've been missing a few sessions here and there, but at least my conscience is clear – I always make sure that I tell my referee in plenty of time. And according to my friends the story has benefited through my absence. I think they mean that the story has gone in directions it wouldn't have otherwise, but sometimes I wonder...

"The reasons people can't make roleplaying sessions are many. The excuses for not telling someone are none."

HOW TO DEAL WITH MISSING PLAYERS, PART TWO... Makes some excuse for that character not being there that week, or get him out of the scenario quickly, but in a way that he can easily be brought back in. Maybe he's been coshed over the head and needs a few days rest...

Ed's Comment

I shouldn't be writing this Ed's comment really, it should be Andy. You see, Andy is, perhaps, the most dedicated referee that I know – he's near fanatical about his Thursday nights, and he's the first referee that I've come across who gets genuinely upset when, for whatever reason, the night's session has to be cancelled.

I can see his point, for the excuses that some of the players in our regular group (erm, including myself I'm afraid) dream up so they don't have to trek to Andy's house in Bath are invariably crap. Watching the football... Well, fair enough. But when it's something along the lines of, "Er, I've got to get the last pages of the magazine out because it's deadline tomorrow." Well, that's just plain ignorant of the fact that Andy's put a great deal of effort into preparing the night's roleplaying.

What am I getting at? Perhaps we can take our roleplaying too seriously; if we miss a week, well, there's always the next.

ON THE SOAPBOX is your page – it's where we give you the opportunity to get something off your chest (as long as it's to do with the gaming industry, of course). The views expressed by you on this page aren't necessarily the views of arcane, or of the arcane editorial team. If you'd like to have your say, send in a piece of around 1,000 words long to: On the Soapbox, arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Or e-mail it to: arcane@futurenet.co.uk

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Tribal offering

whether your character is diplomatic by nature or a less-than-civilized barbarian, *The Tribes of Crane* provides the longevity and depth needed to fully develop its personality. **Matthew Green** joins the gathering.

An alternative offering

A Bledian Diary **is another highly regarded tribal game. It's also set on an Earth-like planet, and has no real magic to speak of, the technology being somewhat similar to a medieval equivalent of our own. It has all the classic ingredients of a good tribal game, and as such is a very involved game. Unlike *Crane* it is fully computer supported, offering you the chance to send turns in as often as you wish, which can mean well over 50 per year if you are extremely keen, or as few as 5-6 a year (as with *Crane)* if you wish to keep to a tight budget.**

The rules system is well constructed, and in most respects this is a pleasing game, offering a vast spectrum of possibilities. The computerisation was a necessary step, enabling a fast turnaround and opening the game to a much larger number of players. It's not nearly as detailed as *Crane*, but as far as computer-assisted PBMs go, *A Bledian Diary* offers a high degree of human moderation, allowing for a reasonable degree of player individuality.

Spellbinder Games is offering arcane readers the opportunity to pay just £6 for the rules and first four turns (normal cost is £15) in *A Bledian Diary*, further turns costing £2.50 each. For details contact: Spellbinder Games, 76 Doncaster Road, Wath-Upon-Dearne, Rotherham, South Yorks S63 7AF.

WELCOME ONCE AGAIN to **arcane**'s regular look at play-by-mail, the postal gaming set-up which enables roleplayers to participate in games for the price of a mere postage stamp. In this month's installment we investigate *The Tribes of Crane,* an enduring, open-ended tribal gathering from Zen Games, and, in the panel on the left, we offer **arcane** readers a special price for *A Bledian Diary,* an alternative tribal game, courtesy of Spellbinder Games. In last month's issue the editor reported on his confident start to the *It's a Crime* PBM – however, this month his fortunes have taken something of a nosedive as he describes on the right.

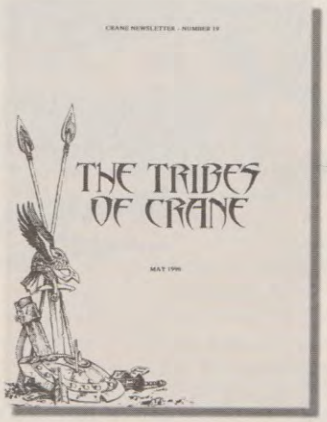
Once upon a time, as so many fairy tales begin, the first commercial PBM games graced the face of this unsuspecting world. They consisted of scribbled notes, sketchy adventures and most of all, possibilities. However, over the last 20 years the majority of PBM products have been vastly improved – efficient computer control systems and high-quality laser printed turn results are now all commonly packaged into well-designed low-cost games. These are the games that most of you will know, but they are not the only PBMs available. Whereas most of the early PBMs were eventually re-written and extensively modernised, there were some vast giants of games that refused to be tamed. The deepest of these were the 'tribal games', and of these the biggest and the darkest was *The Tribes of Crane.*

The Tribes of Crane

Zen Games, free entry to waiting list! (That means it's damn good.) Turns £4.

This is the original tribal PBM game, first released in America in 1978 and still running. When the first pioneering players began playing this game, nearly 20 years ago, they breathed life into a beast that would be almost impossible for any computer to ever digest, and as such *TOC* has refused to be completely modernised.

It is set on an Earth-like planet, with a technology similar to our own around the time of the Roman Empire. There is no magic, but the power of religion is strong.



An initially fairly empty planet surface has been so shaped by the actions of generations of players that it is now somewhat more complex and detailed than our own real world. Like most tribal games, this is an open-ended scenario (it never ends), and any action you take will ultimately effect the adventures of players years into the future. This is a game in which you can immerse yourself totally, and roleplay a tribal chieftain to an extremity of depth that is normally only possible with tabletop roleplaying systems.

The Tribe of Crane is, for some, the perfect PBM roleplaying environment. It has its problems, though. Given the immense depth of this game, it is currently run only as a labour of love. Refs will spend several hours carefully calculating your turn results and creatively writing all of your results. The result of this is that each player usually receives no more than 5-6 turns per year, as opposed to the 50+ turns possible with most of the completely modernised games. To some, this is a good way of playing a highly detailed game with dozens of others players, without having to pay a vast amount of money, or spend too many hours each week deciding where you want your tribe to wander next. Most players tend to participate heavily when it comes to diplomacy, and write several letters a month between turns to formulate global plans and strategies. The game is currently dominated by those seeking to form Roman-type city-based civilisations. If you are interested in such developments it is commonplace for new players to be granted political office. On the other hand, if you're more of a barbarian there is ample opportunity to wantonly destroy whatever everyone else has been working so hard to build.

After 18 years, the final stages of *Crane's* computer 'background control system' are nearly in place, and the current rulebook is being re-designed with quality artwork. If you are interested in this game get your name on the waiting list ASAP, by sending an SAE to:

Zen Games, 25 Cromwell Road, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH12 2NW

It's a Crime

WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG? Last month I was doing okay – plenty of blocks, plenty of money, gang members, guns... And now, now I have nothing. Or, at least, very little. So, my tip for *It's A Crime* players the world over this month... Don't, under any circumstances, try to make a deal with someone and then doublecross them early in the game. Chances are they'll have friends who stay loyal, and who enjoy kicking butt. *Paul Pettengale, the editor, is currently playing game 5 of* It's a Crime *by KJC Games. Phone KJC on 01253 866345.*

Drop us a line **If you have any PBM-orientated questions or comments please drop us a line at arcane, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. We are particularly interested to hear from any players who have recently won games, or those of you who have cunning tips to share with other arcane readers. You never know, if you're lucky you might just manage to win yourself one of those coveted arcane T-shirts.**

OKAY, BOYS, LET'S GO OVER DIS AGAIN. WHEN THE BIG GUY INNA RED SUIT SHOWS UP, JIMMY VIOLIN HUSTLES 'IM INTO DA CORNER.
AN WE SEZ WE BEEN NICE...REAL NICE...THEN WE DEMAND THE GOODS. YEAH.
NOIR... SHADES OF NOIR...FACES IN THE CROWD AND ALL THE REST. HE DON'T GIVE 'EM UP, WE PLUG 'IM. AND THE LITTLE REINDEER, TOO.
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Aftermath

so you think you'd survive in a post-holocaust world? phil clare braves the mutant rats and neo-nazis in the radiation-drenched rubble of *Aftermath*.

Designed by Bob Charrette and Paul Hume

Published by Fantasy Games Unlimited £20

First Published in 1981

VALUES UNDERGO A FAIRLY RADICAL shift after the Ruin (as it is styled by the writers of *Aftermath).* Finding a six-pack of baked beans is likely to be a lot more use than a gold bar. Society as we know it has collapsed in some unspecified catastrophe, and characters with adapted saucepans on their heads wield sledgehammers and tyre irons, scavenging the ruins of civilisation searching for, well, anything really. Never mind treasure hordes and mighty magicks, staying alive here is the real victory. If you come out of a session with a couple of extra bullets or a new wristwatch then you've done pretty well.

Aftermath was another production from the excellent Fantasy Games Unlimited, and if the names of the designers look familiar, then that's probably because you read the review of *Bushido* in **arcane** 6. I'd only ever played *D&D* before I was introduced to this game, and it came as a bit of a shock to me to discover that there were no character classes. Not only that, but it looked like I'd need a good grade in maths and a calculator to figure out the rules. So, if you think that classes and levels are appallingly artificial and you yearn for a 'realistic' combat system, then this is definitely the game for you.

The system is entirely skills and stats based, and characters improve through 'learning by doing'. This extremely simple concept means that if you successfully use a skill in the course of the game, then there's a fair chance of it improving. You still need your calculator of course, but it seems to work pretty well and gets away from the artificial feel of many other games.

As for the combat system, it truly is one for the purists. Gun enthusiasts and lovers of TLAs (see sidebar) will like it too. If you can't easily keep track of your BAP and BDG, and calculate your BCS and CDA when heavily encumbered and wounded in the leg, then keep the aspirins handy. Comprehensive hit location charts (30 different places you can get shot!) and a well thought-out Detailed Action Time (DAT) system of resolving combat steps complete the picture.

In contrast to the combat the background has been left deliberately vague. The Ruin could be anything from a comet strike to nuclear war, anything from 2 to 200 years before the campaign setting, and suggestions for running a variety of campaign types are in the 'referee's eyes only' section. The rules for mutants (animal and human), radiation and biological agents are all kept from the players too – it's nervous work without a Geiger counter. The rules envisage a fragmented society where disparate groups try to eke out a living for themselves – that compound across the valley could belong to a bunch of peace-loving vegetarians or it could be the terrain of Hitler Youth revivalists. The surviving communities tend to be closely knit and very suspicious of outsiders. Remember *Mad Max II*? It's all very well for a community to possess a refinery and an oil well, but they'd better be well prepared to hang on to it – and they certainly aren't going to give any away for free. You get nothing for nothing on the edge of the Rad Zone.

Superstition and pseudo-religion can make a comeback too. It's a golden opportunity to introduce those dodgy primitive cults from your fantasy campaigns into a more modern setting. The revised agendas of the human race are not the only danger either. The hyper-evolved master rats have already figured out how guns work – heaven help the human race when they learn to drive a tank! The rulebooks paint them to be disorganised and independent, but this leaves plenty of scope for the referee to have them band together and make a bid to take over the world. Will the humans see the danger and learn to co-operate in time? Or is it curtains for the human race? But don't dwell on these things for too long – otherwise you'll find yourself stockpiling tinned food and automatic weapons, just in case...

> **"Never mind treasure hordes and mighty magicks, staying alive here is the real victory."**

It's one of those games where the players can never quite feel safe. I well recall the one character in our party who managed to acquire a set of top-of-the-range military combat armour. He got up everyone's nose for ages, blowing away the enemy with great gusto while we cowered behind piles of rubble, secure in the knowledge that no-one could hurt him. Tragically, he got so confident that he missed a tripwire connected to a claymore mine. True, the armour wasn't penetrated, but the *Aftermath* rules are quite detailed and provide for blast damage inside rigid armour. We had to scrape him out so someone else could use it.

I have always relished a good *Aftermath* campaign, although admittedly, when I started I did have the benefit of a referee who had a good grasp of the maths involved and took a lot of the burden off the players' shoulders. The whole game is designed in a very logical manner and you'll rarely hear a player complaining about interpretation of the rules, though it's still very easy to get bogged down in calculating the effects of a .22 bullet hitting you in the shoulder through a studded leather jacket on the second Friday of the month etc. Nevertheless, the complexity of combat resolution is really the only downside to the game. The rest is an absorbing battle for survival in a desolate wasteland. This game was well ahead of its time and I for one would love to see it re-released and well supported – it certainly deserves it.

ACRONYMS Translations for the uninitiated: BAP = Base Action Phase, CDA = Combat Dodge Ability, BDG = Bullet Damage Group, BCS = Base Chance of Success and TLA = Three Letter Acronym.

ARNIE WANNABES While *Aftermath* predates the *Terminator* films by a few years, the section entitled Cybernetics doesn't need much expansion to include a few Arnie lookalikes.

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11-page top 50 special

What got your vote?

It's never been done before... For the first time in the history of roleplaying, a professional gaming mag polls its audience, asking them: "What are your favourite RPGs of all time?" And now, we present the results, with the 50 most popular roleplaying games ever presented for your delectation.

Paul Pettengale, Editor

The first game ever

• The first ever roleplaying game was, of course, *Dungeons and Dragons*, dating back to 1975.

On the Bandwagon

• *Cyberspace* was launched after *Cyberpunk*, the most popular of the near-future sci-fi games.

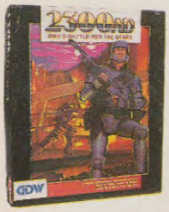
What's it called?

2300 AD

Who is it by? Game Designers' Workshop
First Published 1986

50

What's it about? Set in the year of the title, *2300 AD* is a sci-fi game depicting humanity's first colonisation of the stars. Earth in 2300 AD was still divided into competing nations, and so you had French Space, American Space and so on. Everything was going okay until the violent Kafers attacked without warning, throwing humanity into its first galactic war.



What's it like? *2300 AD* is rooted in 'hard' science fiction. The realistic science and technology leads to a gritty, realistic feel. Perhaps one of the best alien species ever created for an RPG, the Kafers are truly alien, with a unique physiology, psychology and society.

What's it called?

MechWarrior

Who is it by? FASA Corporation
First Published 1985

49

What's it about? *MechWarrior* is the roleplaying supplement for FASA's wildly successful *BattleTech* tactical wargame. *BattleTech* is set in the far future of the 31st and 32nd centuries, and depicts a universe torn by warfare. Although the warring factions have fleets of spacecraft and armies of tanks and infantry, the most powerful weapons at their disposal are the BattleMechs, 50' tall robotic walkers armed to the teeth. In *BattleTech*, players control groups of these machines and throw them against each other in a tactical wargame. In *MechWarrior*, players take on the roles of characters, but not necessarily BattleMech pilots.

What's it like? Over the years since its original release, FASA has developed every aspect of the background and history of the *BattleTech* setting. The result is a detailed universe overflowing with potential for adventure.

What's it called?

Dragonwarriors

Who is it by? Corgi Books
First Published 1985

48

What's it about? *Dragonwarriors* is another 'high' fantasy system, with a similar background and feel to the Basic version of *Dungeons and Dragons*. It is different, however, in that it was published not as a boxed set or A4-sized rulebook, but as a series of six paperbacks, available in high-street book stores and, even, WH Smiths.

What's it like? Unfortunately, even though this is a fine, solid system, the format makes it tricky to use in play. Still, it was well received throughout its short life, and is highly collectable these days.

What's it called?

Fighting Fantasy

Who is it by? Games Workshop
First Published 1984

47

What's it about? Fantasy. But then, that much is obvious. This system is a spin-off RPG from the *Fighting Fantasy* 'choose your own adventure' style books, which were made so popular by Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson in the '80s.

What's it like? To say that it is basic would be a huge understatement – *Fighting Fantasy* has just a couple of stats from which a character is created, and combat is a simple case of rolling six-sided dice, pitching one creature's stats against another. It's fun, quick and easy, which explains its popularity.

What's it called?

James Bond 007

Who is it by? Victory Games Inc.
First Published 1983

46

What's it about? Spies and espionage, as based on the books and films featuring that most English of heroes.

What's it like? Because of the subject matter, and because the rules are easy to get to grips with, this proved to be an instant hit. It has also been backed up with a couple of cracking supplements – *Thrilling Locations* and the *Q Manual* – which makes creating all manner of interesting scenarios an absolute breeze.

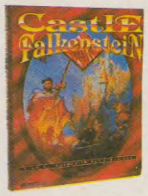
What's it called?

Castle Falkenstein

Who is it by? R Talsorian
First Published 1994

45

What's it about? *Castle Falkenstein* is set in an alternate Victorian Age, where magic is real and steam technology has advanced to the point where wondrous machines are possible. Characters in the game can be detectives, diplomats, faerie lords, gentlemen thieves and so on.



What's it like? *Castle Falkenstein* is one of those games that people tend to either love or hate. It has a unique atmosphere, combining alternate history, celtic mythology, steampunk and a somewhat whimsical, fairy-tale feel. Likewise, the rulebook itself is quite different from many, being laid out as a novel, with important information pulled out in sidebars, and the rules coming later. This reflects the main thrust of the system, which is heavily geared towards roleplaying and storytelling over game mechanics and numbers, and drops dice in favour of a couple of packs of playing cards.

What's it called?

Cyberspace

Who is it by? Iron Crown Enterprises
First Published 1989

44

What's it about? *Cyberspace* is a cyberpunk game, one of several that followed the release of R Talsorian's *Cyberpunk*. It's set further in the future, and has a higher level of technology than many other cyberpunk systems. Its setting is also further removed from the present day.

What's it like? One of the most detailed cyberpunk rules systems, what really sets *Cyberspace* apart is its cybertechnology. Rather than presenting a shopping list of things your character could have implanted in his or her anatomy, *Cyberspace* includes full rules for designing customised cyberware. By connecting sub-systems to different inputs, outputs, activation controls and power sources, players can create their own systems.

What's it called?

Dark Conspiracy

Who is it by? Game Designers' Workshop
First Published 1991

43

What's it about? A near-future world in which society has almost collapsed. The super powers have disintegrated, economies have been wrecked, governments are losing grip and anarchy rules on the streets of the vast metroplexes. But *Dark Conspiracy* isn't simply a gritty cyberpunk-style game. Something is behind this strife. Something evil.

What's it like? Players take on the roles of people who have learnt of the evil forces at work in the world, and are struggling to defeat them. The evil forces have infiltrated what remains of the government and powerful corporations. A great blend of cyberpunk, *Call of Cthulhu* and conspiracy paranoia.

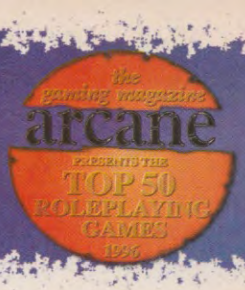
READ THE REVIEW

• arcane reviewed *Don't Look Back* in issue 5. It was the first *X-Files* style game that we'd looked at.

AFTER THE BOMB

• There were some fine scenarios released for *TMNT*, including *After the Bomb* and *Road Hogs*.

Spanning 11-page top 50 original



WHAT'S IT CALLED?
DON'T LOOK BACK

WHO IS IT BY? MIND VENTURES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1994

42

What's it about? Think Mulder, think Scully, think *X-Files*. Got those images fixed in your head, together with the Men in Black, the flashing torches, the mysterious murders and paranoia? Well, that's *Don't Look Back* for you.
What's it like? This was, until the release of *Conspiracy X* earlier this year, the best of the modern day horror/conspiracy systems. The actual mechanics are a tad clunky, but the world background and the way that the authors set the scene means that no ref can fail but to come up with dozens of classic campaign adventures.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
GOLDEN HEROES

WHO IS IT BY? GAMES WORKSHOP
FIRST PUBLISHED 1984

41

What's it about? Caped crusaders and sound effects that go "Pow!" This game emulates those comic books you read as a kid.
What's it like? The gameplay reflects a refined approach to the superhero genre, and roleplaying tends to take priority over combat.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
HEROES UNLIMITED

WHO IS IT BY? PALLADIUM BOOKS
FIRST PUBLISHED 1984

40

What's it about? This hasn't had many supplements until recently, so people must have played in standard worlds, but with guys in cloaks and tights wielding bizarre powers.
What's it like? Superhero roleplaying for the *Palladium* player, but not all that easy to pick up.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
HOL

WHO IS IT BY? WHITE WOLF
FIRST PUBLISHED 1994

39

What's it about? It's all hand written, so it takes time to find out about this planetary garbage dump/penal colony for a galactic empire/fast food corporation/religion. Or about character skills such as "Making Sharp Things Go Thru Soft Things That Scream And Bleed."
What's it like? People often buy game books purely to read, but with *Hol* that's pretty much the point, although there is supposed to be a rules system in there.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
TOP SECRET/SSI

WHO IS IT BY? TSR
FIRST PUBLISHED 1983

38

What's it about? Spies and espionage. It was quite a hit for a while, with several supplements and adventures released.
What's it like? *Top Secret* is inspired more by *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* and the lighter James Bond movies than real life. Players belong to an organisation of 'good guys' pitted against the 'bad guys' – a thinly veiled analogy of the Eastern Bloc. Gadgets and manners are more important than combat skills, and there are rarely nasty deaths.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
GHOSTBUSTERS

WHO IS IT BY? WEST END GAMES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1986

37

What's it about? Who can forget that immortal line: "It slimed me"? Well, this is the game of the film.
What's it like? *Ghostbusters* sports a wacky collection of stats, a wild way of handling skills and combat, and instead of experience you earn Brownie Points. Really rather clever.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

WHO IS IT BY? PALLADIUM BOOKS
FIRST PUBLISHED 1985

36

What's it about? The subject matter of this system is a bit, well, odd, suffice to say that within *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Other Strangeness* you play mutant animals with humanistic abilities.
What's it like? The rules are badly laid out, but the principles are easy to learn and combat is fluid. So, fine on that score. It's a superbly fun game to play because of its quirkiness, and the fact that the post-apocalyptic setting has most of California under the ocean. Fantastic fun.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
TWILIGHT 2000

WHO IS IT BY? GAME DESIGNERS' WORKSHOP
FIRST PUBLISHED 1984

35

What's it about? The Third World War and its aftermath. Set in Europe after a nuclear war, the game assumes player characters are American servicemen cut off from their lines of supply and abandoned to survive for themselves.
What's it like? Pretty much all the previous 'post-apocalyptic' RPGs had been fairly fantastical, and had been set some time after the apocalypse. *Twilight 2000* is realistic and set in the middle of the breakdown of European society. Involving, but not exactly cheerful.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
DREAM PARK

WHO IS IT BY? R TALSORIAN
FIRST PUBLISHED 1992

34

What's it about? This is based on Larry Niven and Steven Barnes' stories of a futuristic VR-based recreation centre – kind of Disney World meets Treasure Trap, with holograms. You play a near-future Californian roleplayer.
What's it like? You can run a continuing character – the gameworld player – while playing in a string of scenarios, and even if you get killed your character isn't dead, just embarrassed or annoyed. The D6-based system is simple and the published scenarios are colourful.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE

WHO IS IT BY? WHITE WOLF GAMES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1994

33

What's it about? Werewolves, but not the evil killers of traditional horror. Instead, the Garou is a separate race, dedicated to protecting the Earth – sort of 9' tall eco-terrorists with teeth.
What's it like? Being the second game in the *Storyteller* series – which includes *Vampire, Mage, Wraith* and *Changeling – Werewolf* shares the same system and setting, the World of Darkness. It contains lots of background for the Garou, and their struggle to fight the forces of the Wyrm. It can be fast, vicious, or tragic and thought-provoking.

On the Edge

• Atlas Games has released a collectable card game version of *Over the Edge*, called *On the Edge*.

Games Workshop

• Bless their cottons, repackaged *Stormbringer* in 1985, using some fantastic new artwork.

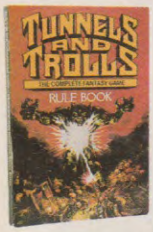
What's it called?

Tunnels and Trolls

Who is it by? Flying Buffalo
First published 1975

32

What's it about? Given that it appeared only just after *Dungeons and Dragons*, it's not surprising that *T&T* is remarkably similar. Unlike *D&D*, however, it doesn't really progress above the dungeon-bashing mentality.



What's it like? *T&T* is pretty crude, but that's not surprising given how early it was released. It was subject to a number of revisions and reprintings (the one depicted here is a paperback Corgi version from 1986), but it didn't ever get much better. It's probably here for nostalgic reasons.

What's it called?

Millennium's End

Who is it by? Chameleon Eclectic
First published 1992

31

What's it about? Technothrillers – the modern style of gritty fiction pioneered by Tom Clancy, which has been applied to the works of Frederick Forsyth and Craig Thomas among others, and seen in films such as *Die Hard* and *Rising Sun*. *Millennium's End* is set in 1999, and attempts to capture the elements that make technothrillers so popular.

What's it like? *Millennium's End* struggles hard to cut the right balance between fiction and reality, and just manages it. The game system is detailed, but this allows it to model the style of fiction it's based on with more accuracy. Players carry out investigations, espionage and paramilitary operations, all of which are ably supported.

What's it called?

Skyrealms of Journe

Who is it by? Skyrealms Publications
First published 1986

30

What's it about? Earth settlers landed on the planet of Journe and, after time, forgot how to do that space travel stuff and were 'stranded' on this globe. The technology has regressed, though humans have become psionic (as you do).

What's it like? Bonkers. Okay, so it is a good game in terms of atmosphere, system structure, presentation and the depth of the background, but it's bonkers.

What's it called?

Aftermath

Who is it by? FGU
First published 1981

29

What's it about? Nuclear war has ravaged the Earth, and people live from day to day, scrabbling to eak out a meagre existence in this post-apocalyptic nightmare. Think *Mad Max*, think *Threads* (the TV movie the Beeb showed in the 1980s), think *Terminator* (sort of). This is an ugly premise for a game, but it's a change from high-fantasy and space opera.

What's it like? *Aftermath* can be a harrowing game. Still, in the hands of a decent ref, it can also be one of the most involving to come out of the pre-1985 boom, with plenty of scope for freeform campaigns.

What's it called?

Over the Edge

Who is it by? Atlas Games
First published 1992

28

What's it about? Dark happenings on a Mediterranean island that may not even exist. Conspiracies, weird science and alien invasions. The amazing thing is that it appeared before *The X-Files* made this stuff trendy. It's inspired by the writing of William Burroughs, plus a bunch of other nightmares.

What's it like? A fine, twisted game, with enough happening to keep players confused for years. And the rules system is a beauty. PCs are defined by a handful of abilities which you invent to suit yourself, plus some personal history to give the ref some hooks; virtually everything is resolved by rolling a small number of six-sided dice. Fast, easy to play and hard to fathom.

What's it called?

Champions

Who is it by? Hero Games
First published 1981

27

What's it about? *Champions* started out as a bare framework for creating and running heroes in the world of four-colour comics. But since then, supplements have added plenty of background and introduced variations such as the gun-toting vigilantes of *Dark Champions*.

What's it like? It wasn't the first superhero RPG and it never had licensed links to any big-name comics – but it's still *the* classic of the genre. It popularised the now-commonplace 'points-design' approach to character creation; in fact, it's probably the most flexible, detailed points-based system ever, which makes it rather overwhelming for some new players, and combat can be a little slow. But once you've learned how to use it, no other game catches the feeling of superhero action in quite the same way.

What's it called?

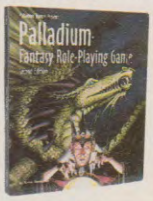
The Palladium Fantasy RPG

Who is it by? Palladium Books
First published 1985

26

What's it about? Just what it says – this is a fantasy roleplaying system. While the original edition was fairly generic in its approach, the supplements and the recently released *2nd Edition* concentrates more heavily on the *Palladium* world. This is an interesting setting that breaks away from many of the traditional fantasy clichés and includes some ambiguous moral areas and elements of horror.

What's it like? Well, the rules are almost identical to those in *Palladium's Rifts* roleplaying system, and as such it's well suited to existing players of that game, who will have little to learn. Even newcomers should have little difficulty with *The Palladium Fantasy RPG*, though. The rules lie somewhere between *AD&D* and *Rolemaster* in complexity, and combine character classes with a simple skills system. A good alternative to the better known Fantasy RPGs.



What's it called?

Stormbringer

Who is it by? Chaosium
First published 1981

25

What's it about? *Stormbringer* is, as all Morcock fans should know, the name of Elric's sword, a weapon that draws the very lifeforce from anyone it even scratches. It doesn't take a genius, therefore, to work out that *Stormbringer* is the Elric/Young Kingdoms roleplaying game (which was in fact renamed as *Elric!* for its 1993 re-release, for clarity's sake).

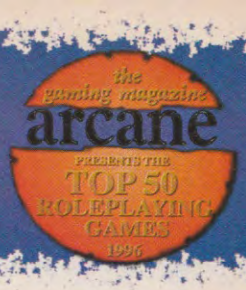
What's it like? A simplified *RuneQuest*, only set in Elric's world. It captures the spirit of the books, but to play it properly you really need to be familiar with the novels, and they are of the type of fantasy that you either love or loathe.

THE END IS NIGH

• The first scenario published for the *Judge Dredd RPG* was superb; it was called *Judgement Day*.

WE GAVE IT A NINE

• We were so impressed by *Conspiracy X* that we gave it a massive four-page review is issue 7.



WHAT'S IT CALLED?

EARTHDAWN

WHO IS IT BY? FASA CORPORATION
FIRST PUBLISHED 1993

24

What's it about? *Earthdawn* is a fantasy world set in an ancient and mythical past. For hundreds of years the nightmarish Horrors have ravaged the lands while humanity huddled in underground kaers, praying that its magical wards would hold. Now the flow of magic through the world has begun to fall once more, and the dark days of the Scourge have passed, people have begun to emerge from their hiding places and begin the long process of rebuilding what has been destroyed.

What's it like? Very good indeed. *Earthdawn* combines traditional fantasy with *Call of Cthulhu*-style horror and a detailed background to create an evocative and interesting setting. Combined with a clear, well-designed rules system and an impressive range of supporting supplements and adventures, this is an excellent fantasy game. It's also of special interest to fans of *Shadowrun*, because it describes the past of the same gameworld.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

CONSPIRACY X

WHO IS IT BY? NEW MILLENNIUM ENTERTAINMENT
FIRST PUBLISHED 1996

23

What's it about? Well, conspiracies, really. Set in a version of our world in which aliens and the supernatural are very real, players in *Conspiracy X* are members of Aegis. This ultra-secret organisation hides within government agencies and is dedicated to protecting the Earth from the threat posed by both aliens and the supernatural alike, all the while waging a covert war with The Black Book, another hidden organisation which has allied itself with aliens in order to gain a technological advantage. Aegis agents use cover identities, captured alien technology, psychic powers and old-fashioned investigative techniques in their fight to save an unknowing population from destruction and slavery.

What's it like? By far the best of the modern-day horror games inspired by *The X-Files*, *Conspiracy X* has a meticulously constructed background which combines reality and fiction to create a frighteningly plausible setting. Reading through the background is enough to spark ideas for scenarios and even whole campaigns. The rules are simple and quick, while still allowing for a fair degree of complexity, and feature a unique and interesting system for dealing with psychic powers. Excellent stuff.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

RIFTS

WHO IS IT BY? PALLADIUM BOOKS
FIRST PUBLISHED 1990

22

What's it about? Basically, it's the culmination of the *Palladium* line of games. In the future mysterious dimensional portals appear all over the Earth, which then fragment into a patchwork of high-tech enclaves, magical kingdoms and regions where anything is possible. So you can meet cyborgs, robots, mutants (animal and human), demons and aliens – and you do. PCs usually try to protect the nicer folks in this world from the ensuing carnage.

What's it like? It's the ultimate in old-style high-energy RPGs. It uses a class-and-level system, and its supplements are full of new character classes, as well as weapons, robots and power armour. Fantasy-style creatures are a bit less common, and tend to be rather conventional elves and orcs – although it's perfectly possible to play a baby dragon. One of the key concepts is 'mega-damage', which is important when you're playing with giant robots and such. This is the game for people who want to have everything possible in their campaigns – and then to blow a lot of it up with cool super-weapons.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

JUDGE DREDD RPG

WHO IS IT BY? GAMES WORKSHOP
FIRST PUBLISHED 1985

21

What's it about? The words 'bleeding' and 'obvious' spring to mind, but then there might be one or two people out there who don't know that Judge Dredd is the infamous lawman of the 22nd century who rides around on an enormous bike killing bad guys. The players take on the role of similar Judges, patrolling the streets of Mega City One, solving crimes and tracking down the perps. The game draws heavily on the *2000 AD* comic strip, but then it would, and it does it well.

What's it like? This is one of the best roleplaying systems ever created. It oozes atmosphere and spits out gritting violence and playability, and generally makes for a very good time indeed. The excellent way in which the rules are laid out (and written), helps referees to start running the game almost straight out of the box. In our eyes, it should have featured in the top ten. To find out which other roleplaying games we would have voted for turn to page 35, where Paul and Andy spill the beans on their favourites.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

SPACE 1889

WHO IS IT BY? GAME DESIGNERS' WORKSHOP
FIRST PUBLISHED 1989

20

What's it about? *Space 1889* is steampunk with very little punk. It is 'hard' SF (there are no elves or dwarves), set in a Victorian period in which those fun early SF clichés are true: dinosaurs roam the jungles of the planet Venus, and a dying civilisation clings to giant canals in the face of the advancing deserts of Mars.

What's it like? Although the character generation is a delight – the stats include Social Standing – the system itself combines simplicity with incomprehensibility. You have to be prepared for lots of house rulings and on-the-spot improvising, or take an easier route and convert to another system. Comparisons with the later *Falkenstein* are inevitable and not necessarily to *Falkenstein's* credit. *Space 1889* avoids fantasy hangovers, or the pretence that the setting is a utopia. Imperialism exists, and its complexities and gradations are not glossed over. The game leaves it up to the players (and ref) to decide whether they become bold imperialists or bold freedom fighters for the Martians. You bring your own biases to *Space 1889*, rather than being forced to accept the predigested ideas of its authors.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

ARS MAGICA

WHO IS IT BY? LION RAMPANT/WHITE WOLF/WIZARDS OF THE COAST/ATLAS GAMES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1988

19

What's it about? Roleplaying re-examines its roots. The setting centres on a solidly researched and largely accurate depiction of Europe in the Middle Ages – except that magic really works. PCs are members of the Order of Hermes, a scholarly society of magicians with a broad streak of the mad scientist to them. Alternatively, you can play 'grogs' – the wizards' rather disposable mercenary guards – or, as a compromise, middling-powered 'companions'. The usual objective is to build and maintain a 'covenant' – a sort of college or club for wizards.

What's it like? This is a fantasy game for the thinking player – although there's plenty of scope for action, too. A first success for Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein•Hagen, who both went on to even bigger things, *Ars Magica* includes one of the most flexible, highly-regarded magic systems in the roleplaying hobby. The game, which places heavy emphasis on storytelling, is extremely popular with fans who have followed its troubled history through four different publishers. With Atlas just about to produce a new edition, those fans are currently feeling suitably optimistic.

11 – Retro top 50 Special – Page top 5

GOING WAY BACK

• Each month in **arcane** we do a retro' review of an old game. In issue 6, we took a look at *Bushido*.

RELEASE FRENZY

• *GURPS* is a game that has a tremendous number of releases supporting it – two to three a month.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

FENG SHUI

WHO IS IT BY? DAEDALUS ENTERTAINMENT
FIRST PUBLISHED 1996

18

What's it about? Not, as Andrew Rilstone points out in his column this issue (see page 17), a game about arranging furniture. Instead, *Feng Shui* is a game about action movies, especially the fast-paced, over the top creations of Hong Kong directors such as John Woo. Players take on the roles of ridiculously hard action movie heroes fighting against powerful groups who are intent on world domination. Their battles pit them against modern-day gangsters, insidious conspiracies, futuristic cyborgs, ancient magicians, nightmarish demons from the Underworld and, of course, armies of henchmen, as the battle for the future of the world rages across time.

What's it like? In a world, brilliant. *Feng Shui* recreates the movies that inspired it with single-minded genius, and consequently is one of the most fast-moving, action-packed and enjoyable roleplaying games around. Players are actively encouraged to perform all manner of outrageous stunts and hair-brained schemes, and the rules deliberately ignore all of the traditional roleplaying game elements that have a tendency to slow things down. Hardly ever has there been a game that offers as much pure action, excitement, adventure and fun as *Feng Shui*.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

BUSHIDO

WHO IS IT BY? FGU
FIRST PUBLISHED 1981

17

What's it about? The rather civilised lands of feudal Japan made, in the relatively early days of the roleplaying hobby, for an equally civilised gaming experience for all concerned. FGU's *Bushido* encourages roleplaying over conflict, because the mighty warriors of the Samuri have a code of honour which simply has to be stuck by. Family interests and feuds form the best part of the action, together with righting wrongs and resolving disputes in this finely balanced land.

What's it like? Those of us who have had the pleasure of playing *Bushido* over an extended period of time have noticed that this is a game which lends itself far more towards campaign play than one-off scenarios. Consequently, it takes a lot of effort and dedication on the part of the players and referee alike to play through, and even more effort to run successfully. Nevertheless, the effort is rewarded with fun, albeit a somewhat reserved, thoughtful kind of fun, rather than the more gung-ho kind of action you would usually expect from the likes of *AD&D*.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

MAGE: THE ASCENSION

WHO IS IT BY? WHITE WOLF
FIRST PUBLISHED 1993

16

What's it about? The third of White Wolf's *Storyteller* games, *Mage* is based on an intriguing premise – that reality is subjective, not a fixed constant, and that certain people can reach a level of consciousness at which they grasp this fact and can impose their will to shape the universe to their wishes. Such people are called mages. In the World of Darkness setting, mages are organised into four groups. The Technocracy is in charge, and is responsible for instilling a 'rational' world view on the people. Fighting against them are the Traditions, of which the players are members, groups of mages united in their desire to throw off the shackles of the Technocracy. Lastly come the Marauders and the Nephandi, groups dedicated to the powers of chaos and evil, respectively.

What's it like? *Mage* is perfect for those of a philosophical bent. It's a hard game to get right, requiring a great deal of thought from players and referees alike, but its underlying theme – the nature of reality – makes it one of the most interesting and mature roleplaying games available.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

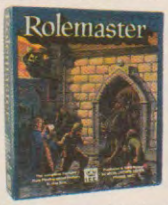
ROLEMASTER

WHO IS IT BY? IRON CROWN ENTERPRISES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1982

15

What's it about? *Rolemaster* is ICE's fantasy RPG, and the rules went on to form the core of the *Spacemaster* and *Middle-earth* games. The rules are generic, and designed to be used in a wide variety of fantasy campaigns. The system is split into books – Arms Law about weapons and fighting, Spell Law about magic etc – making it easy to find information.

What's it like? Often used as an archetypal example of a complex roleplaying system, *Rolemaster* is a fairly numbers-heavy game that also relies on the use of a lot of tables. Most notable are its notorious 'critical hit' charts, which are subdivided by damage type and describe various horrific wounds in graphic detail. If you're looking for a highly detailed and fairly complex system, *Rolemaster* has a great deal to recommend it. The rules are fairly well organised and very flexible, easily adaptable to a wide variety of situations. On the other hand, if you're not one for tables and calculations, it's probably not going to ring your bell.



WHAT'S IT CALLED?

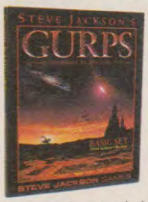
GURPS

WHO IS IT BY? STEVE JACKSON GAMES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1986

14

What's it about? *GURPS* stands for Generic Universal Role Playing System, and it was arguably the first truly genre-less game system to be published. The aim of *GURPS* is to provide a basic framework of rules that can be used to model any situation or setting, enabling you to play different games without having to learn a different system. It's also ideal for time or dimension-hopping campaigns. A wide variety of sourcebooks has been released for the system.

What's it like? Based around a points system and six-sided dice, *GURPS* succeeds better than most 'generic' games. The rules are flexible and it's well supported – regardless of what you want to do with it, you'll probably find a supplement with some advice and background. The game suffers from being a little too detailed at times, and can get bogged down in numbers. Still, it's an adaptable system with some superb supplements.



WHAT'S IT CALLED?

WRAITH: THE OBLIVION

WHO IS IT BY? WHITE WOLF
FIRST PUBLISHED 1994

13

What's it about? Being dead. In most games, of course, dying is the end of your character. In *Wraith* it's only the beginning. This is the fourth game in White Wolf's *Storyteller* series, which also includes *Vampire, Werewolf, Mage* and *Changeling*, and deals with the restless dead of the World of Darkness. Wraiths must protect the items and people that link them to the world of the living, all the while fighting with their darker side and often trying to finish some task begun in life. The game describes the parallel dimension in which wraiths live, and the complex politics and factions which struggle for control over it, together with the wide variety of powers and weaknesses possessed by these undead spirits.

What's it like? Deep, strange and not exactly cheerful, *Wraith* is nonetheless an interesting RPG. The game's background provides a setting rich in ideas, and breaks away from many of the traditional ghost stereotypes. *Wraith* is not a game well suited to casual play, but given a group that's prepared to put some effort in, it can be very challenging.

NOT LONG NOW!
• Fans of the *Star Wars RPG* should enjoy 1997 – all three of the *Star Wars* films are being re-released.

A NEW VERSION
• R Talsorian Games plan to launch a new version of *Cyberpunk* next year, using the new *Fusion* rules system.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
PENDRAGON

WHO IS IT BY? CHAOSIUM
FIRST PUBLISHED 1985

12

What's it about? The full title gives it away really: *King Arthur's Pendragon*. Yes, this is the game of that lost time when knights defended the honour of their king and damsels where in distress. Again, based on the *RuneQuest*/Chaosium system, this differs from most games in that the time scale is exaggerated – a game session represents a whole campaign year. This makes for rapid character progression, though in terms of personal life rather than in the power stakes; a character is more likely to settle down and create a family than go off with sword in hand looking for trouble.

What's it like? *Pendragon* is a game with a huge amount of charm. It's extremely character orientated, and so players have the opportunity to spend time developing a separate persona, rather than having to deal with too much action. It has intrigue and complicated plots, but these are geared around the characters instead of merely being an excuse for the characters to do something.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
MIDDLE-EARTH ROLEPLAYING

WHO IS IT BY? IRON CROWN ENTERPRISES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1985

11

What's it about? Well, there was this language student called Tolkien who fancied himself as a writer. When his kids came along, he thought he'd bash out a couple of yarns about little stumpy guys who liked going on quests for treasure, and called them *There and Back Again* and *The Lord of the Rings*. His kids liked them and he thought he'd try to make a few bob by getting them published. You know the rest – you've probably read 'em both, know your Saurons from your Sarumans and, therefore, know all about *Middle-earth* roleplaying. Hobbits verses orcs, good verses evil, white verses black. That's *Middle-earth*.

What's it like? The popularity of the books, we would suggest, explains why the game based on Tolkien's world is so popular. For the system is overly complicated (being based on the complex *Rolemaster* system – see number 15), and it suffers from the problem of timing. For example, in which time do you set your campaign? Set it before *The Lord of the Rings* and everyone knows what's going to happen, set it after *The Lord of the Rings* and you've got to make a whole load of stuff up. Still, the supplements are all good, if you get off on bucketfuls of detail and polished prose. Not for everyone, sure, but die-hard Tolkien fans should check it out.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
CYBERPUNK

WHO IS IT BY? R TALSORIAN
FIRST PUBLISHED 1988

10

What's it about? *Cyberpunk* is about the style of near-future, gritty science fiction pioneered by William Gibson and several others. The original game was set in 2013, with the *2nd Edition Cyberpunk 2020* set seven years later, and describes a world in which governments have slowly lost power in the face of vast multinational corporations. Society has continued along its present course, with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, and the streets of the big cities have become urban war zones as rival gangs clash with each other and heavily armed police. At the same time, advances in technology have lead to the development of direct interfaces between computers and the human brain, allowing cybernetic parts and 'cyberspace', a virtual reality representation of the world's communication networks.

Players in *Cyberpunk* take on the roles of street-smart survivors, dedicated to overthrowing the uncaring corporate power structure which they blame for many of the world's problems. It's about revolution in the face of insurmountable odds, loud music, fast cars and big guns.

What's it like? *Cyberpunk* was the first of the 'straight' cyberpunk RPGs, and is still the best. The difference between cyberpunk and other sci-fi is a matter of style and attitude. Everything about the *Cyberpunk* game, from the background to the rules system, is designed to create this vital atmosphere. *Cyberpunk* is set in an unforgiving world where betrayal and double-crosses are common, trust is hard to find and paranoia is a useful survival trait.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
STAR WARS: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

WHO IS IT BY? WEST END GAMES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1986

9

What's it about? *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* is based on George Lucas' trilogy of *Star Wars* movies and the subsequent novels and comics. It offers players the chance to take part in the Rebellion's desperate battle against the Empire and the Dark Side of the Force, either before, during or after the time of the three movies.

What's it like? Very good. The rich and varied background already created by the movies helps a great deal, but there have been many games based on great fiction, and few of them work nearly as well as *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*. Everything about the system has been designed to complement the setting's unique blend of fantasy, science fiction and myth, and to recreate the same feel and atmosphere as the movies.

The rules system is beautiful in its simplicity, yet ably copes with everything from vicious space battles to speedy chases through narrow canyons. A clever set of guidelines covers the use of the Force, complete with details of both its Light and Dark sides, enabling characters to make heroic efforts and pull off the kind of stunts that are vital to what *Star Wars* is all about.

Perhaps the perfect system for introducing new players to roleplaying, and yet offering more than enough to keep even the most jaded gamers happy.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
SHADOWRUN

WHO IS IT BY? FASA CORPORATION
FIRST PUBLISHED 1989

8

What's it about? One of the few games to successfully merge two very different genres, *Shadowrun* is a combination of cyberpunk and fantasy. Set in the 2050s, the game features all of the traditional elements of cyberpunk – vastly powerful multinational corporations, social decay, sharp dividing lines between the haves and have-nots, high technology and low-tech grunge, man-machine interfaces, and so on – but with a peculiar twist. In *Shadowrun*, magic returned to the world in 2011. As the level of mana (magical energy) rose, human parents began to give birth to strange children, quickly dubbed by the media as elves, orcs, trolls and dwarves. New Age mystics and tribal shaman alike reported that their spells and rituals begun to work, and dragons were seen in the skies.

Players in *Shadowrun* take on the roles of Shadowrunners, independent agents hired by corporations and others to do their dirty work for them. Runners use a blend of high technology, skill, smarts and magical abilities to get their jobs done, whether it be stealing a rival's prototype or rescuing a kidnap victim.

What's it like? *Shadowrun's* strength lies in the cleverly designed background, which creates a unique setting that actually works and is continually evolving. It also ties in with FASA's other main system, *Earthdawn* – while *Shadowrun* is the future, *Earthdawn* is the past of the same world. Between the two a fascinating universe has been created, offering a great deal of potential for all styles of play.

WHAT A LAUGH!
There were loads of adventures published for *Paranoia* in the 1980's, perhaps the best being *Orcbusters*.

DON'T MISS IT
The best campaign Paul has ever played through was the *Enemy Within* campaign for *WHFRP*.

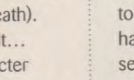
WHAT'S IT CALLED?
PARANOIA

WHO IS IT BY? WEST END GAMES
FIRST PUBLISHED 1985

What's it about? A third world war has irradiated the Earth, forcing man to go below the surface and dwell in huge, computer-controlled cities. Alpha Complex is one such dense area of population, but this one has a difference: the computer, which acts as the complex's government, has gone completely and utterly insane. Every citizen in Alpha Complex has a security clearance, a measure of trust which not only governs his responsibilities in this utopia-gone-wrong, but where he can walk, what he can wear and even to whom he can talk.

Players adopt the roles of troubleshooters; crack agents who help the Computer and its trusted chums to eradicate treason throughout the complex. Thing is, every player character is in fact a traitor, because each has a mutant power and a secret society allegiance which are both highly treasonous (and punishable by death). Which kind of makes their lives somewhat difficult…

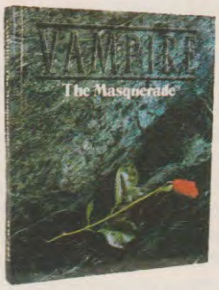
What's it like? For players of games where character development and campaign continuity are a priority, *Paranoia* is an absolute no-no. If a character (of which there are six versions – each person in Alpha Complex has six clones) lives through an entire scenario then they're doing well. Hell, they're doing better than well, they're probably Jesus Christ reborn (er, no offence intended, all ye Christian types). Suffice to say that *Paranoia* is, and always will be, a complete laugh – it should be played for nothing more than fun (and for more on *Paranoia*, see our Retro review in **arcane** 10).



WHAT'S IT CALLED?
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE

WHO IS IT BY? WHITE WOLF
FIRST PUBLISHED 1992

What's it about? Once again, no prizes for guessing this one. *Vampire: The Masquerade* was the first of White Wolf's *Storyteller* games set in the World of Darkness, a range which has since been expanded by the addition of *Werewolf, Mage, Wraith* and *Changeling*. On its initial release the game caused something of a stir, because rather than pitting the players against the blood-sucking ones it cast them as newly-created fledgling vampires, struggling to survive in the cut-throat society of the undead. Obviously owing a great deal of its inspiration to the works of Anne Rice, *Vampire* casts its protagonists as tragic figures, desperately clinging to the vestiges of their lost humanity in an effort to control the dark side of their natures. Young vamps have it tough in the World of Darkness, where there are many threats, most coming from older and more powerful members of their kind.



What's it like? *Vampire* has always proved the most popular of the World of Darkness games, a testament both to the continuing appeal of the vampire itself, and to the structure and design of the game. Like all of the *Storyteller* range, it's not an easy game to get right, and it relies heavily on both the players and the referee putting a lot of effort and imagination into their roles. With a good group, though, it can be an immensely interesting and thought-provoking game, and one of the most effective horror RPGs around. Despite its tendency to take itself a little seriously, *Vampire: The Masquerade* has a great deal to offer the more mature and serious gamer.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
RUNEQUEST

WHO IS IT BY? CHAOSIUM
FIRST PUBLISHED 1978

What's it about? Another fantasy system from the early days of roleplaying, *RuneQuest* manages to establish itself as a cut above the rest because of its intricate and highly original campaign setting. Created by Greg Stafford, the Gloranthan world is perhaps the most famous among all campaign settings, being an island which is floating on the river of time. It is a harsh world to live in, whether you are an adventurer or otherwise, and this harshness spills over into the atmosphere of the game. This is a world that combines high-fantasy heroism with the gritty realities of cross-humanoid racism and the problems of day-to-day living. The cults of the world, which play an intrinsic part of every adventurer's life, add to the mysticism of the game, and give it a level of depth which other fantasy systems can be but envious of.

What's it like? The Gloranthan world is indeed a joy to roleplay within, but *RuneQuest* suffers from a couple of problems which prevent it from being as popular as *AD&D*. Foremost among these is the combat system which, though highly realistic (it has hit locations and realistic damage calculation), is complicated and therefore slow to execute. A battle with a half-dozen combatants can be dealt with easily enough, but the moment you get about ten a whole evening's play could be gobbled up by a single fracas.

Still, *RuneQuest* is one of those games which has its die-hard fans, and deservedly so. Here's looking forward to the *Gloranthan* RPG from Chaosium which is due next year.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY

WHO IS IT BY? GAMES WORKSHOP/HOGSHEAD PUBLISHING
FIRST PUBLISHED 1986

What's it about? From a time when Games Workshop was still both distributing and indeed developing roleplaying games, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* opened the eyes of *AD&D* and *RuneQuest* die-hards as to exactly how a 'dark fantasy' game should be. It concentrates on blending horror and political intrigue with the more traditional elements of fantasy, such as magic, strange races and the like. The initial campaign which was launched at the same time as the game, *The Enemy Within*, is quite possibly the best campaign ever released – it manages to mix combat, investigation and a whole heap of roleplaying together to create an involving experience for referee and players alike. And because the campaign world (loosely based on a feudal Germany) has a veneer of peace and civilisation, the grim truth behind the facade has that much more impact.

What's it like? *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is an extremely atmospheric game to play in. The character generation and progression system (which has players acting out, for the most part, pretty ordinary people) makes for highly developed and rounded characters – far more so than *AD&D* (until the recent release of the *AD&D Skills and Powers* supplement). Consequently, players get a huge amount of fun out of *Warhammer*.

But then, the referee has levels of enjoyment which supersede anything which has gone before. The 'truth' is something that he always has on his side; something that the players can never discover, no matter how successful they are throughout the campaign's adventures. This gives the game a feeling of a cross-breed between *AD&D* and *Call of Cthulhu* – and if you've played these other two games, you can probably imagine what a superb mix that can be.

LOOK OUT FOR MORE
Now that its published *Traveller*, Imperium Games has got a host of supplements planned for 1997.

COMING SOON
TSR, the creators of *AD&D*, has got a science fiction RPG planned for next year. It's called *Alternity*.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?
TRAVELLER

WHO IS IT BY? GAME DESIGNERS' WORKSHOP
FIRST PUBLISHED 1977

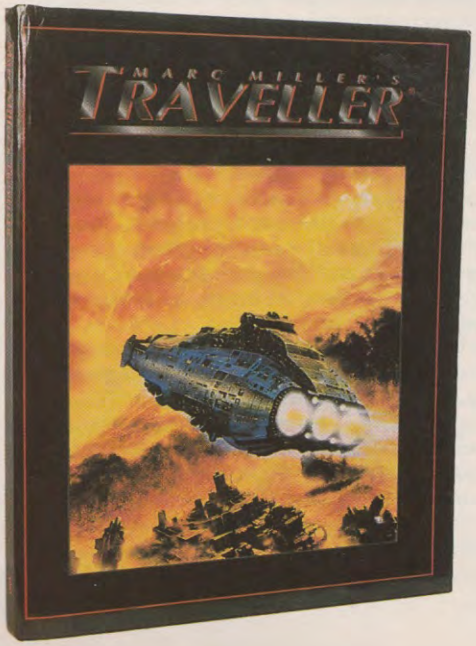
What's it about? The 'hard' style of science fiction for which authors such as Clarke and Asimov are famous. Although originally intended as a generic science fiction system, *Traveller* quickly became linked with the Imperium campaign background developed by GDW.

3

The Imperium is a vast interstellar human empire, the third such to span the stars. It is bordered by the Solomani and Zhodani empires, also human, and a variety of alien governments. Although all of the Imperium is theoretically under the control of the Emperor, even the fastest ship would take nearly two years to cross from one side of the vast empire to the other. Because starships are the fastest form of communication available, the Imperium is run on a day-to-day basis by a feudal structure of Barons, Counts and other nobility, and planets are pretty much left alone to govern themselves.

This background offers a great degree of freedom for individual referees to run campaigns of their own devising, while providing enough basic groundwork to build from, and has proved to be immensely successful. Everything from political intrigue to action-packed mercenary actions, trading or scientific exploration is possible, and a lot more besides.

Since its initial release, *Traveller* has gone through four different editions – the original, or *Classic Traveller*, then *MegaTraveller*, and *Traveller: The New Era*. At the start of this year, Game Designers' Workshop folded, and for a while the future of the game looked uncertain. Now, however, newly formed Imperium Games has re-released the game in a new edition, called simply *Traveller*. And that's good news for science fiction gamers everywhere.



What's it like? *Traveller* was the first science fiction roleplaying game, and for many people it's still the best. What makes it stand out from other successful systems is its emphasis on the 'science' in science fiction. *Traveller* postulates no more than three major scientific breakthroughs in current scientific understanding, and all the technology in the game can then be extrapolated from either those or existing scientific principles, with only a couple of exceptions for game balance.

Not only does this give *Traveller* a consistency and logic that's rare in other sci-fi systems, it also gives the game a hard-edged realism that makes it all the more absorbing and enjoyable to play, especially for fans of 'hard' science fiction.

This is complemented perfectly by a simple but flexible game system which uses only six-sided dice and yet can cope with everything from one-on-one gunfights to vast space battles, and manages to produce 'realistic' seeming results for all of them. *Traveller* was one of the first roleplaying games to use a skills system for defining characters, and remains almost unique in its character generation system. Rather than creating the character from whole cloth, players first generate the basic stats and skills of the character at 18 years old, and then proceed to guide him or her through a career, gaining skills and experience as they progress.

Combine all of this with the vast and detailed background that has slowly evolved around the Imperium, and you end up with one of the true classics of the roleplaying hobby. So, a well deserved 3rd place for *Traveller*.

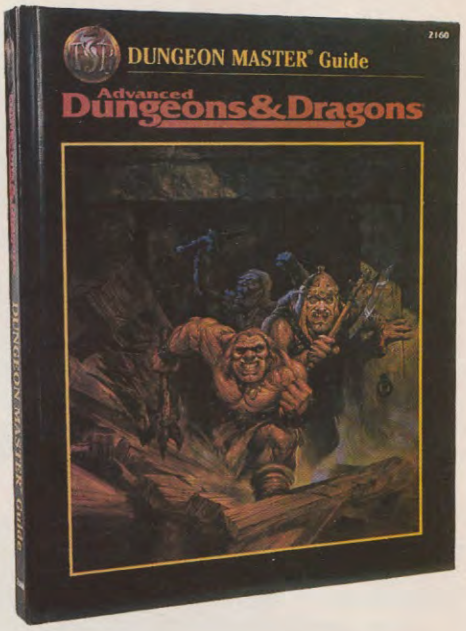
WHAT'S IT CALLED?
ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

WHO IS IT BY? TSR
FIRST PUBLISHED Debatable, but let's say 1975

2

What's it about? The original fantasy roleplaying game (and, indeed, the very first RPG ever), this now massive system covers just about every single nuance of the genre. There are numerous campaign settings, and thus more than one *AD&D* world, offering players and referees choices galore in terms of the style and pace of the game as they want to play it.

Briefly, the *AD&D* worlds break down as follows: the *Forgotten Realms* setting is the longest standing fantasy world ever created, and it's pretty typical in terms of its use of races (elves, humans, dwarves and the rest) and magic, which errs on the more powerful side. The *Planescape* setting, on the other hand, is a more surreal fantasy collection of worlds, where much of the action takes place in the intimidating city of Sigil. Then there's the darkly horrific *Ravenloft* setting, with its collection of vampires and other undead, and finally the *Birthright* world, which is geared around high-powered campaigns in a semi-feudal setting.



What's it like? *AD&D*, despite coming second in this poll, is in fact the most widely played roleplaying game in the world, which would suggest that it's extremely good. Truth is, it's a pain to get to grips with. The sheer amount of information that a referee has to digest in order to run a campaign is quite intimidating – the three core rulebooks run to over 600 pages in total, and that's only scratching the surface.

The actual system is also fairly clunky, with loads of dice rolls and many a reference to tables throughout. This, again, is enough to put newcomers to roleplaying off *AD&D*, but, it has to be said, the system makes sense when you're used to it, and though it's hardly realistic, it makes for some dramatic gaming. And drama is what roleplaying is all about, when it comes down to it.

Where *AD&D* really succeeds, though, is in the level of support it receives from TSR – every month there are close to half a dozen new releases of scenarios, campaign extensions, rules supplements and sourcebooks. This high volume of releases means that the referee has to do very little work himself, that is unless a) he's skint, or b) he's creative enough to do it himself. *AD&D* is a lazy man's system, and this adds to its appeal, especially for roleplayers who've got plenty to do during the day and a social life that needs attention during the nights.

There's no doubt that *AD&D* is a mammoth roleplaying game – one which the huge majority of roleplayers have either started off with, or given a go along the way. It's got support that's second-to-none, and it's good to see that the vast majority of the supplements and scenario collections released for *AD&D* are of better-than-average standard. It's fully deserving of the second place it's attained, and many would question why it's not come top. To which the honest answer would have to be… *Call of Cthulhu* is better which is why you'll find it over the page...

And The winner is . . .

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

CALL OF CTHULHU

WHO IS IT BY? CHAOSIUM
FIRST PUBLISHED 1981

What's it about? Whoa, stop right there, for first we need:

Drum roll, trumpet fanfare, choir of angels and other musical stuff which you get before an important announcement…

"And the winner is…" (as award ceremony hosts have a penchant for saying) "…the mighty, the one and only, *Call of Cthulhu!*"
[Wild applause.]

Ahem. *Call of Cthulhu* is *the* most popular roleplaying game of all time, it's official. But, what's it all about? Well, *Call of Cthulhu* is based on the worlds developed by the much-respected HP Lovecraft, author of many a short tale about alien forces which lie in wait, readying themselves for the day when 'the stars are right' and they ascend to power, displacing mankind as rulers of Earth, and generally being pretty nasty to everyone they meet.

There are those, of course, who have an inkling that all is not well with the world, that there are paranormal forces acting against the good of man, and that, given half a chance, these forces would eat everyone for breakfast.

BUT, these investigatory types are dismissed as paranoid freaks; desperate people who seek to sensationalise the odd, to rouse the suspicions of the blissfully ignorant, and to make life extremely hard for the cops. They are not to be tolerated – lock the lot of 'em up in mental institutions and let them rot!

Call of Cthulhu can be as horrifying to play as it is fun. With a decent referee, or Keeper as they're called in the game, a scenario builds up from a seemingly innocent note from a long-forgotten relative to a gut-wrenching crescendo of maniacal cultists and eldritch horrors that show their faces and then get lost before anyone left sane can load their gun. *Call of Cthulhu* is, it has to be said, one of the few games that can be genuinely frightening to play through.

Lovecraft, living when he did (he died in 1937), set most of his stories in the 1920s, and traditionally *Call of Cthulhu* games are set in the same period. However, the system is flexible enough to use other period settings for campaigns – any time, in fact, and various supplements have made this entirely possible. So a *Cthulhu* campaign set in the Middle Ages is just as viable as one set in a few hundred years from now – the precepts of the Lovecraftian mythos are completely timeless, and this has added to the appeal of the system. It's a bit good, it really is.

COMPLETE GAME
Ages 12 up
CALL of CTHULHU
5th EDITION
Horror Roleplaying in the Worlds of H.P. Lovecraft
Sandy Petersen & Lynn Willis
WITH Keith Herber, William A. Workman, William Hamblin, Mark Morrison, Lee Gibbons, AND FRIENDS
CHAOSIUM
2336

> "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."
>
> HP Lovecraft

What's it like? Aha. Now that's easy. For 'tis great, and there can be no doubt (otherwise it wouldn't come first now, would it?). But merely to say that it's great just isn't doing you lot any service, so we'll attempt to explain exactly why *Call of Cthulhu* is the best thing since diced veg…

The rules are blissfully simple. Apart from the initially confusing resistance table, and the fact that it mixes percentile rolls with D6-based attributes, the Chaosium rules system (which was first seen in *RuneQuest* and then scaled down for ease of use in *Call of Cthulhu)* is, as far as we're concerned, the finest of the 'old school' rule sets. So that's that sorted.

The background is one of the finest ever devised. Lovecraft, described by Stephen King as the "Dark Prince of Horror", dedicated his whole life to thinking up and writing about his series of collected stories which formed the so-called *Cthulhu* Mythos. This impressive level of depth, and the fact that it's all pretty darn clever, makes for one of the most intricate and 'believable' game premises ever devised.

To expand this point, there's an almost limitless amount of material that any *Call of Cthulhu* referee has to draw upon for inspiration, because Lovecraft's tales have been added to posthumously by writers who can appreciate a bloody good plot device when they cast their eyes upon one. This makes the creation of scenarios and campaigns terrifically easy, though the more creative referee can still play with plot intricacies to craft an adventure which is distinct from the norm. The huge amount of support material for *Call of Cthulhu* is testament to the variety in game style that the system has to offer, though sadly, much of the really good campaigns released by Chaosium are currently out of print (such as *The Spawn of Azathoth, The Dunwich Horror* and *The Masks of Nyarlathoptep;* the latter of which is actually being reprinted – look out for a review in **arcane** 16).

When in the hands of a particularly good referee, *Call of Cthulhu* is one of the few games that can be genuinely scary to play. Generating an atmosphere of fear and tension is incredibly difficult (although we covered how to best do it in our issue 7 lead feature – see page 53 if you missed it), but the subject matter in *Cthulhu* lends itself to it well. *Call of Cthulhu* is all about implied horror, rather than gross-out limb-rendering horror, and so it's far, far easier to use it to scare your players witless.

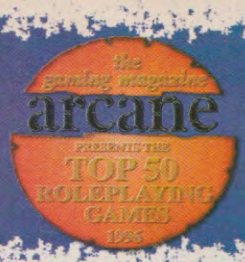
Call of Cthulhu is fully deserved of the title as the most popular roleplaying system ever – it's a game that doesn't age, is eminently playable, and which hangs together perfectly. The system, even though it's over ten year's old, it still one of the very best you'll find in any roleplaying game. Also, there's not a referee in the land who could say they've read every Lovecraft inspired book or story going, so there's a pretty-well endless supply of scenario ideas. It's simply marvellous.

WHAT ARE WE PLAYING?

The **arcane** team try and meet up with mates to roleplay at least once a week. And our current games...

WHAT ARE WE PLAYING?

...Feng Shui, as run by Andy, *AD&D* (the *Night Below* campaign), and *Deadlands*, also by Andy.



What do we make of all of this then?

Was the top 50 roleplaying games listing what you expected, or did you think, as indeed the arcane *editorial team did, that there were a few surprises in there?*

We have to admit that *Call of Cthulhu* coming out top was no great surprise to us. It is pretty well the perfect roleplaying game, marrying a brilliant system with a background that breeds scenario ideas faster than randy rabbits can knock out offspring. Chaosium can be proud.

Some of you may find it surprising that *AD&D* didn't win, for some roleplayers think that the hobby starts and ends with TSR's most famous of creations. It's heartening to see that this is not the way the majority of roleplayers think – don't get us wrong, there's nothing wrong with *AD&D*, it's just that it's important, in our opinion, to broaden horizons and play a variety of roleplaying games; you wouldn't want to read the same series of novels all your life, would you?

What did surprise us was just how far up the list *Paranoia* came. Now, this is a personal favourite of Paul's, the editor, but it hasn't had anything published for it in ages, and it's very much a niche game compared with, say, *Star Wars* or *Cyberpunk*. We can only assume that you've all got a far better sense of humour than we could have possibly hoped. *Paranoia* is the antipathy of the huge majority of RPGs because it encourages the players to work against, rather than with each other, with the referee working against everyone. But it works, and it deserves the place that it managed to achieve.

It's also good to see that *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* has done so well. It was a popular game when it was released, mainly because of the Games Workshop backing and the fact that it got huge amounts of coverage in *White Dwarf*. But it risked slipping into marginality when Games Workshop ditched it. We can only presume that the re-release of the system by Hogshead Publishing last year has managed to bring it back into the hearts and minds of players the world over, so it's hats off to James Wallis for re-establishing the authority of this game.

Games which we expected to see there but which didn't make it? Well, there's *Living Steel*, but it has to be said that this was a minority system, despite the fact that it was really rather good; *DC Superheroes*, which was well supported during the mid-1980s and which was made famous because of the release of the *Watchmen* supplements; *Marvel Superheroes*, which was another popular superhero game; *SLA Industries*, which was supported by Wizards of the Coast when that company was still publishing RPGs; and, finally, *Chivalry and Sorcery* – a hugely complicated game, but one which had a dedicated following. Perhaps these will feature the next time we stage a poll; only time, as they say, will tell.

We asked all of you to tell us your ten favourite RPGs so that we could compile the top 50, but how about us? What are our top games?

How would we have voted?

Paul's Top Ten

1. **Call of Cthulhu**
I have to concur over the best RPG ever – to this day I've never played another game which could actually scare me rigid. Simply the best.

2. **Paranoia**
It's the funniest game I've ever read or played, and the players in the games I ran always had a superb time. Original and timeless.

3. **Judge Dredd**
This game is hard-hitting when it wants to be, humorous at times, and based on my favourite comic strip of all time. Excellent fun.

4. **AD&D**
Nostalgia over game mechanics here – yes, *AD&D* can be unwieldy, but it's the game I started out on, and for which I have the fondest memories.

5. **Living Steel**
It didn't get a single vote from you lot, but for me, well, a finely-crafted game with a campaign background that just cries out to be played in.

6. **RuneQuest**
I've always ran it as a far, far darker game that *AD&D* – more akin to *WHFRP* in fact – and it's always worked very well for me.

7. **Don't Look Back**
I'm a big fan of *The X-Files*, and this is the game that I use to recreate that nervous feeling of paranoia and bemusement in my players.

8. **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**
Not a brilliant system, it has to be said, but nevertheless this game is so darn silly it was an absolute must for my group in the mid-80s.

9. **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**
A grown-up fantasy game which, once you ditch the spiky bits, makes for some fantastic and fun roleplaying. It works especially well when running *The Enemy Within*.

10. **Feng Shui**
This game has been the basis of many a fine night spent roleplaying (and it's one of the few games you can drink lots of beer with and still understand what's going on).

Andy's Top Ten

1. **Feng Shui**
This has to get the prize, if only for providing more action-packed thrills and sheer fun than any other system I've ever had the pleasure to play.

2. **Traveller**
Still an all-time classic, and the new fourth edition is the best yet. Just the overwhelming scope and flexibility of the system and setting are impressive enough.

3. **Conspiracy X**
I'm a fan of *The X-Files* as well, but I think *Conspiracy X's* carefully-crafted background and gritty style wins out over Paul's favourite of the genre, *Don't Look Back*.

4. **Shadowrun**
One of the most imaginatively developed settings ever, *Shadowrun's* blend of magic and technology gives the game greater scope than other cyberpunk systems.

5. **RuneQuest**
Although *D&D* introduced me to roleplaying, it was *Traveller* and *RuneQuest* that really hooked me. Still one of the most fluid game systems around. Great stuff.

6. **Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game**
This is a superb game in its own right. Still perhaps the best system for introducing people to roleplaying, and great fun for everyone.

7. **Earthdawn**
A clever blend of genres from FASA, this time fantasy and horror. *Earthdawn* also manages to capture the best elements of both the high and low fantasy styles.

8. **Mage: The Ascension**
Every now and then I feel the urge to play something more thought-provoking and serious, and *Mage* is my game of choice. This requires more imagination from both players and referees than most, but it's worth it.

9. **Cyberpunk 2020**
One of the first games to use the rules not simply as mechanics, but as a means to promote and strengthen the style and atmosphere of the game.

10. **Deadlands**
This has only just been released and so didn't make it into the top 50, but this bizarre blend of wild west and horror could be a real hit.

Next year you'll have another chance to vote, this time for the 1997 **arcane** Reader Awards, which will be presented to coincide with GenCon.

EYE OF THE

Why use gamespeak when all it does is reduce your roleplaying to repeating statistics? Antony Johnston suggests ways that referees can make their sessions more colourful.

Storytelling

"Jezret the Valiant crept silently round the edge of the door frame. Slowly the room beyond came into view – first the green haze of sorcerous smoke, then the arcane inscriptions on the high walls, indecipherable to his uneducated eyes. Next he saw the stone steps leading up to a dais in the centre of the room. Atop the altar stood Barg the evil sorcerer, his eyes glowing fiery red. In his right hand he held the legendary Elf-blade, in his left a glowing green orb…"

An unoriginal but evocative description of a typical scene. Now compare this: "Jezret walks into the room, using Silent Move. It's full of green smoke, and the walls have got inscriptions on, but they're in High Magickal so he can't read them. In the centre of the ten by ten room are some steps leading to an altar. Barg stands at the top, holding a magic sword in one hand and a Sphere of Clouding in the other…"

This is more than just a matter of storytelling style. It's a question of player knowledge and character knowledge. I remember being terrified at the mere mention of a beastie with big horns and nasty fangs in *Tunnels & Trolls* – 13 years on it's hard not to be jaded. We all know what a Dryad looks like, we know that Wights drain your life-force. But there is a way to delay the inevitable, "Oh look, a skellie. Elf, don't bother, you'll only do half damage. Wizard, fireball it." How? By not telling your players anything their characters wouldn't know. This is easy to do if you're starting a new game in a new setting, but you can still put the mystery back into a long-established game.

Data control

Keeping player and character knowledge separate is never easy, but as a referee you can minimise the chance of the two crossing over by restricting information, even during character generation. This may sound a little harsh or impractical, but it isn't. It just requires a little more work by the referee. When it comes to choosing abilities – skills, spells, powers, whatever – ask your players what they want to be able to do rather than giving them a list of descriptions. Give them the most appropriate skill according to what they describe, but don't tell them how the mechanics of it work. This also discourages powergaming.

This can easily be done with magic, too (or any form of mystical powers). Ask Mages what effect they want to achieve, from the simple, "I want to be able to hurl lightning bolts around," to "I want to communicate with the spirit of a tree." If they belong to an order of Mages or have a mentor, give the spell a name other than the one in the rulebook. If they're training themselves ask them to make up their own spell names. Different orders

"I remember being terrified at the mere mention of a beastie with big horns and nasty fangs in *Tunnels & Trolls* – 13 years on it's hard not to be jaded."

illustration © arcane by Lee Carter

BEHOLDER

of wizardry and other self-trained Mages should have different names. What may be 'Storm's Fury' to one Mage could be 'The Hand of Zeus' to another.

During play, try to keep the mechanics invisible. Instead of saying, "You hit the Orc in the arm for 6 points of damage, but he's wearing chainmail so it only does 2," try, "You swing at the Orc from the side, striking his sword-arm. It's a strong hit but it practically bounces off his chainmail and he seems unhurt."

When a player wants to use a skill, tell them what dice to roll, but not what they need to roll to succeed. Describe the difficulty instead, such as, "You've seen locks like this before. It should be easy to pick," or, "That rock looks pretty solid. It'll probably take two of you to budge it." This requires a lot of trust on the players' parts, but it's worth it for the extra tension. Only through experience will they learn just how high they can leap, or how many well-placed blows it takes to slay a goblin, just like real life.

Remember other characters will have different perceptions. A local innkeeper might describe the bandits terrorising local merchants as, "horrid, gigantic, black-skinned creatures with yellow eyes and huge fangs. One of them is enough to kill six men." That should be enough to have the PCs looking over their shoulder as they travel the road.

But the innkeeper will have heard the story from a dozen different people, all elaborating and then probably exaggerating himself. So when the PCs are ambushed by Orc bandits they may not even realise this was who the innkeeper was talking about, and carry on looking out for the alleged beasts. (At which point you could have them meet one, as described.)

Chinese whispers

Misinformation is a wonderful thing. Players' minds are inventive things. When you combine the two, the players only need a few unconnected rumours and half-truths to send them flying off into worlds of conspiracy and theory that you could never have dreamed up in your most convoluted moments.

And stop telling them they're in a "ten by four room with a door in the north-east". Do any of them have an unerring sense of direction? Or an architect's training? Tell them it's square, about ten by five, with a door in the left-hand corner. If their map matches yours exactly, something's wrong.

The same goes for treasure. Unless one of the party is trained at evaluating gems just tell them it's a big ruby or whatever. And if one of them is trained, allow for deviation – make him roll for the accuracy of his estimate (bear in mind he's not likely to have his scales to hand). Coinage can be foreign or archaic. Unless any members of the party have travelled to the neighbouring lands, they won't have a clue what the currency's worth: "20 Hruuurgian ducats, eh? I'll give you five gold for 'em." "Erm, is that a lot?"

Finally, magic items should be kept mysterious. Telling the players they've found a Ring of +2 Defense will have them moaning, "Oh no, not another magic ring. Well I've already got one, and the fighter's wearing plate… thief, you have it seeing as you're only wearing leather armour." [FX of referee gnashing his teeth.] Instead tell them they've found a golden ring with an inset jade, engraved into which is the shape of a mountain. They'll soon be squabbling over it before they even think of asking the wizard to check it for magic.

Once again, only experience will show them that the thief doesn't seem to get hit as often as he used to in battle. And even then they may not put it down to the ring. Better still, they may incorrectly guess the ring's abilities due to some lucky coincidences.

"Thief – you've never beaten me at chess before!"

"Aw, shucks. Stroke of luck."

"And he solved that puzzle in the dungeon a bit quick."

"That ring's a brain-booster! Give it here, right now!"

And so the long game wears on. By keeping your players in the dark you make each new monster battled an exciting discovery, each mile travelled a true experience.

Sharing the work

The onus shouldn't entirely rest on the referee to create a game whereby colourful description is used rather than boring old gamespeak. Players have just as much of a responsibility to help the referee out by making an effort to describe their characters' actions in a manner more befitting to storytelling.

Of course, it's far easier for you as a player to let the referee do all of the hard work, but it makes for a far more interesting game if you too add some colour to your description of an event. Instead of merely saying, "I'll hit him with my sword," how about: "I plunge forward, striking out with my trusty sword, aiming to take him from neck to nave"? Yes, this is a somewhat clichéd example, but the principle should stand across all roleplaying situations, combat or otherwise.

The excellent *Feng Shui* is a good example of a game that forces players to be colourful when describing character action. Indeed, the more adventurous the player's description of what he or she intends to happen, the greater the chance of the player actually pulling it off. For instance, in one session the player characters were in a fight with a bunch of mooks in a restaurant. One player intended to take out one of the bad guys, but instead of telling the referee that he was going to plug the chap with as much lead as he had left in his weapon, he announced that his character was going to leap over the bar, grabbing the mook from behind, at which point he'd slam the poor bloke on to the bar-top and slide him down it, face-first, so that the guy's head ended up in the pizza oven at the far end. Yes, it's an ugly scene to envisage, but it had the whole group of players laughing, and the referee reacted appropriately (hell, there wasn't even a pizza oven at the end of the bar until the player had said so – this is the kind of detail which most refs haven't got time for, and so the player was actually helping the referee out by taking some initiative in setting the scene).

So, yes, referees should keep the players in the dark about the rules as much as possible, but players too should do their best to forget what rules they know if it's going to increase the sense of storytelling in a session, and cut down on superfluous rulespeak. Roleplaying is, after all, a group activity, and just because it's the referee who's running the show, it doesn't mean the ref should also be the one who puts in all the effort.

"By keeping your players in the dark you make each new monster battled a discovery, each mile travelled a true experience."

REWARD CEREMONY
Perhaps it's worth trying a reward system for players who manage to ditch the rulespeak and talk in descriptive form. More roleplaying experience points, or whatever reward system your chosen game uses, should be awarded at the end of the session.

CHANGE THE RULES
Some referees find that preventing players from reading the rulebook is the most effective way of ensuring that they don't learn the rules, but this can't always be enforced. So, what to do? How about changing rules and developing a house system that your players can't possibly know?

ENFORCED AMNESIA
The task of keeping the rules separate from the gameplay becomes even more difficult when the players also referee the game that's being played (perhaps with another group). In these situations, you simply have to persuade the players to forget what they know as best they can.

A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION
Feng Shui, a game in which the rules are kept in the background for the most part, was reviewed in issue 1 of arcane. Unfortunately that issue is now sold out, so you'll just have to borrow your mate's copy.

DIE HARD

While the longevity of a roleplaying campaign can enable intricate situations to develop, sometimes you just want a one-night stand of a scenario. Paul Elliott has a date at the flicks.

Fancy a break from the campaign? Let's face it, the vehicle of the roleplaying campaign (where the setting and characters continue to be reused in a long-running or open-ended series of adventures) can be damn tricky to run. By virtue of its long-running nature, the characters are rarely personally involved in the plots that develop around them, but instead continually get caught up in the plots of others. Thus the immediacy of the events can be lost.

It is this immediacy that involves us, the audience, in the stories of the latest cinema releases. You can use the 'exploding bus' routine straight out of *Speed* in a roleplaying campaign, but you may find something essential missing. That something is the fact that the heroes were a cop (Keanu Reeves) who had unfinished business with the bomber, and one of the bus passengers (Sandra Bullock)... For both, it is a life and death thing – it's personal and gripping. Think of almost any exciting, nail-biting movie, and it will undoubtedly feature characters that are inextricably bound up within the plot. The roleplaying equivalent of the blockbuster movie is the one-shot adventure; previously discarded by the serious roleplayer as the poor relation to the campaign, the one-shot game can be incredibly entertaining and is remarkably easy to write and run.

By one-shot adventure, I don't mean a one-off game of, say, *Shadowrun*, with the referee creating disposable characters for that evening's play. Instead I mean a completely new setting, group of characters and plot. The best results are obtained using totally fresh situations and locations – you're not recreating a soap opera here, but a Hollywood blockbuster. There are four easy steps to organising a one-off cinematic scenario...

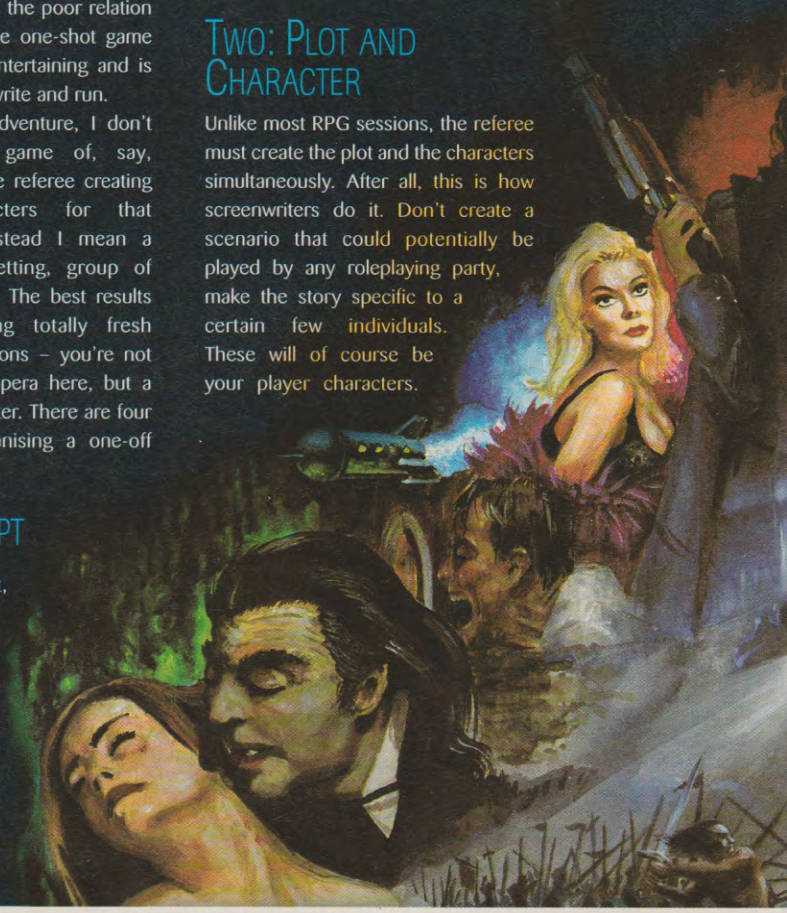
One: Concept

First and foremost, the referee needs to come up with a viable concept, but luckily ideas are everywhere – old TV movies, video rental, the local cinema and so on.

What about a Mafia double-cross? A Spaghetti Western? Horror at an archaeological dig? Transylvanian vampire hunting? Use settings that are immediately familiar to your players – cinematic ideas are probably best due to their constant depiction on the screen. With a one-shot game you haven't the time during play to explain the intricacies of a newly created SF or Fantasy world. Keep the setting simple and familiar.

Two: Plot and Character

Unlike most RPG sessions, the referee must create the plot and the characters simultaneously. After all, this is how screenwriters do it. Don't create a scenario that could potentially be played by any roleplaying party, make the story specific to a certain few individuals. These will of course be your player characters.



ARCANE CAN HELP

arcane's very own Encounters are perfect examples of one-shot games, with familiar settings and pre-designed characters. These make ideal springboards for a cinematic adventure, and the floor plans are littered with props and potential hazards. Turn to page 41 for this month's Encounter.

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WITH A D20

As an example, my Spaghetti Western game revolved around a bank robbery that had been committed the year before. The two robbers, a Mexican and an American, had been chased over the border into the Mexican village of Los Lobos. There they split up and, after hiding the loot, the Mexican was shot by the posse. The posse returned to the States without the gold or the American, who stayed in Los Lobos masquerading as a priest and unable to find the gold.

One year later... The game begins. The three players were given their briefings: one was the priest, still trying to find the hidden gold, one was a bandit, brother of the dead Mexican who has come to Los Lobos for his brother's 'share', and the third was a bounty hunter from the posse, sent by the bank to retrieve the gold. Because this was a Spaghetti Western, I foresaw a cigar-chewing gunfight at the end of the game with all three players desperate to keep all of the gold. They were put purposely at odds to recreate the mood of the films. At one point, when the Mexican bandit found out that the bounty hunter was the one who had shot his brother, he pulled his guns and shouted: "You keelled mah brudda - now you gonna die you steenkin peeg!" The players piled on the atmosphere as much as I did, they were so wrapped up in the familiarity of the genre and the roles that they had been given to play out.

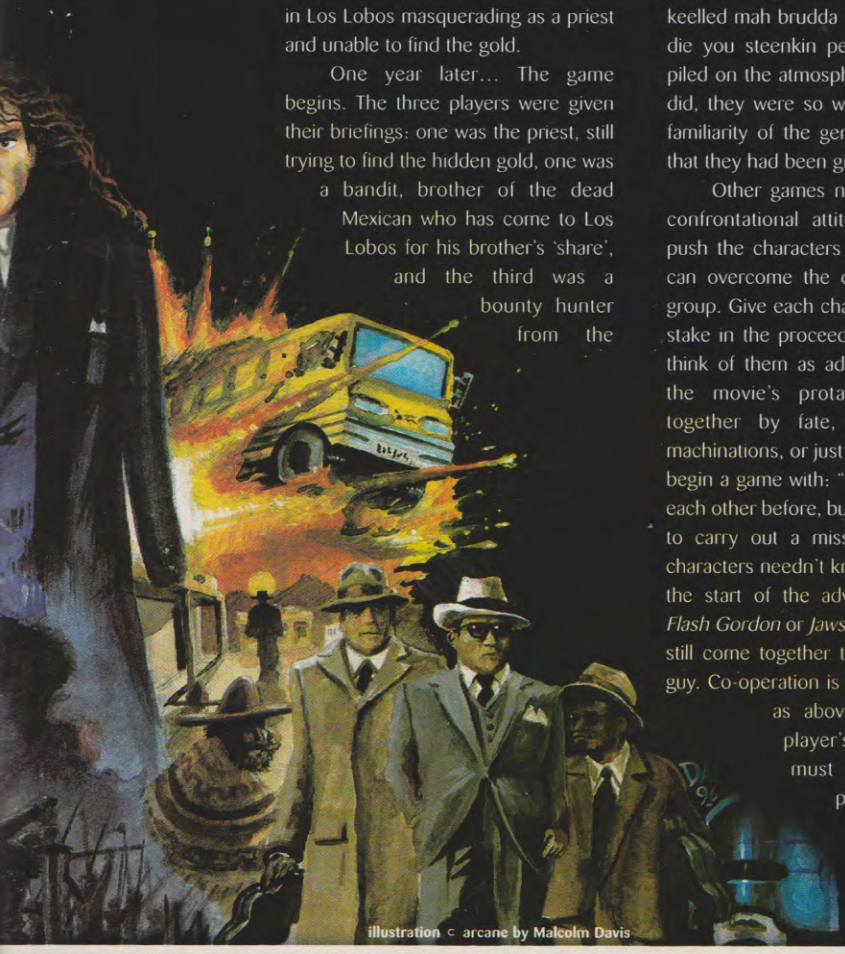


illustration © arcane by Malcolm Davis

Other games needn't adopt this confrontational attitude, but should push the characters together so they can overcome the odds as a united group. Give each character a personal stake in the proceedings - try not to think of them as adventurers, but as the movie's protagonists, thrown together by fate, the bad guy's machinations, or just good luck. Never begin a game with: "you've never met each other before, but have been hired to carry out a mission". The player characters needn't know each other at the start of the adventure (think of *Flash Gordon* or *Jaws)*, but they should still come together to defeat the bad guy. Co-operation is (unless intended, as above) crucial. Every player's primary goal must be the same, perhaps with a secondary goal to complete if one is required.

Three: The All-Important Rules

To play the game you need a rules system. If your one-shot game is to be set in a world well known to your players (Krynn, Middle-earth or *Cyberpunk's* Night City, for example), then feel free to use the appropriate rule system. Otherwise you need a simple and effective set of rules that can be easily learnt, is fast to use and master, and lends itself for use in many different genres. Again, you haven't the time to explain lengthy rules procedures to players – keep it simple.

Most of my one-shot games use a very simple 2d6 system popular with my players, which involves rolling 8 or less for success if skilled, 5 or less if unskilled. Characters have six skills, and my skill list is general enough to bridge most genre gaps at a pinch. Examples from the list include Stealth, Strength, Drive, Handguns, Persuade etc. This 'yes' or 'no' approach to skill values means both referee and player know what the characters are capable of. Remember there will rarely be enough time to master a complex character, the ideal length of time for a cinematic one-shot is a single session.

When deciding on skills, the referee should try not to duplicate the participating characters' skills. Each player character should have unique skills that contribute to the scenario and which make him an essential member of the group. If each character has a skill that is essential for the plot resolution (such as Demolitions or Medicine) then all the better.

SUITABLE GENRES

Some genres are especially suited to the one-shot cinematic game – Japanese Manga, martial arts, cyberpunk and modern day espionage/crime fighting, in particular. Anything which relies on physical action, violence and big fight scenes should translate well.

UL PETTENGALE ART EDITOR MARYANNE BOOTH PRODUCTION EDITOR CLARE JOHNSON ILLUSTRATED BY MALCOLM DAVIES
ane magazine, 1996, ALL RIGHTS RESEVERED • COMING TO A GAMING TABLE NEAR YOU SOON.

Four: Pacing the Story

WISE WORDS 1

"If a player comes up with a clever idea, let him get away with it. Amusing strategies and wild-eyed flamboyance should be rewarded; leave careful planning and detailed tactics to people who play *Stalingrad*." (*Paranoia*, page 57, Gamemaster's Handbook)

If you're at all familiar with Daedalus Entertainment's *Feng Shui* roleplaying game, then giving your scenarios a cinematic kick should already be second nature. It includes an entire chapter on running the game as a movie, and is recommended reading for the one-shot ref. Basically it outlines three main ways to pace a cinematic story. The first is to dispense with trivia. What's trivia? Do you see James Bond reloading his Walther PPK? Do you see Indiana Jones paying his hotel or medical bills? Get the idea? Assume that characters with guns carry an adequate amount of ammo with them, and scrounge more if they need it. Only on a suitable 'fumble' roll will his or her ammo be depleted. Likewise with finances, assume that each character has an amount that fits his or her situation, and give players whatever equipment they want within reason and bearing in mind the initial set-up location. Save time, and concentrate on the all-important story and characters.

WISE WORDS 2

"You should take special care that fights never become boring or routine. The more inventive your combat descriptions are, the more fun everyone will have." (*Feng Shui*, page 169)

Secondly, begin the game with action if possible. As with most action-orientated movies, the detailed briefing and travel to the adventure location takes place well before the opening credits. Begin with something like: "You all have your own reasons for hunting down Dr Thadeus and, after arranging to meet in the village, have made your way up to his hilltop castle. What have you taken with you, and what do you do?" Start the game as close to the action as possible without infringing upon players' free will.

Thirdly, break up the scenario into separate action-orientated scenes, linked by clues and the background story. *Feng Shui* recommends three scenes, one as an introduction, one in the centre and the grand finale, with each scene played out in a separate session. I recommend compressing the one-shot into a single evening with only two major scenes – an opening scene and a finale. Major scenes are the memorable parts of a film, the big battles and confrontations, with most of the other bits being connective filler to get the characters from one scene to the next. (Remember the Harrier fight scene from *True Lies*, or the foundry scene in *Terminator 2?)* Think of an exciting and memorable location for the scene, and make notes on what kind of things could happen there. Junk yards, skyscraper roofs, airport terminals, subway tunnels, steel foundries, railway bridges, rock concerts… think of the movies you've seen and you'll get the idea. Stunts, accidents, dangerous obstacles, tricks and traps, bystanders, improvised weapons and escape routes may be found there – use them!

Especially atmospheric (as movie producers well know) is the use of famous locations, such as the Eiffel Tower, Mount Rushmore or the Grand Canyon. Feel free to try to incorporate a local attraction into the game.

Unanswered Questions

Obviously, the opening scene should leave questions unanswered, as well as clues to be followed up on. Why did Dr Thadeus kill himself before the players could do the job? Why has all his lab equipment been shipped off to a secret Munich address?

The finale should definitely be spectacular and more interesting for the players than the opening section, building the tension and the stakes. Perhaps Thadeus has summoned a demon, and this has installed the doctor's weather manipulation machine into a famous clock tower in Munich. The characters must battle with the monster while catastrophic storms wreak havoc over southern Germany. Pile on the stress, the drama and the risks. Give the players three simultaneous things to worry about, and make the victory something worth remembering.

The Inevitable Sequel

Don't dilute your concept by keeping material back for later games, use everything in a single one-shot. Imagine yourself to be a director or producer for a big budget movie. Of course, you use the best ideas you can find, especially for the final scene, and the bad guys will almost always bite the dust. Let the ending be final. I've found that players will start reminiscing about a good one-shot game ("you remember what happened…", "wouldn't it be cool if…"), and this is the best time to consider, just like that director or producer, if you could get a sequel out of that first one-shot.

Skip ahead a few years, game time, use the same characters (or sons and daughters, or acquaintances), create a new bad guy and start all over again. For some players or referees, the first one-shot was so vivid and full of potential that the desire to create a campaign out of it is overwhelming – in this case your one-shot has turned into a TV serialisation of the movie, à la *Robocop*, or *Planet of the Apes*. But straight away you hit a major problem: how do I get these characters, who were thrown together during the first one-shot, into countless adventures? That original spontaneity will probably be lost and the campaign may develop a jaded, formulaic feel.

Remember – for the one-shot game keep it simple, fast and exciting. Use the flashiest locations, the most exciting character concepts and a selection of plot twists that keeps everyone on their toes. In 15 years of roleplaying, I've found that there is no better way of introducing newcomers to the hobby. With a cinematic setting and a character with pre-defined goals and aims, the newcomer can easily orientate him or herself without delay, and begin roleplaying immediately. Pick a genre or setting, dream up a plot and the characters caught up within it, and get ready to play.

SIMPLE RULES

For an even simpler rules system, write up a prose description for each character and classify it either as a mentally or physically orientated character. Soldiers, miners, explorers and thieves will all be physical, and scientists, computer men, academics and journalists will all be mental, for example. Rate any action on a 1 to 6 scale (1 automatic, 6 very difficult), and use a 1d6 to roll the stated number or over. Apply a penalty of -1 if character attempts something more suited to the opposite orientation. Many actions including combat will be at level

"Remember – FOR THE one-shot game KEEP IT SIMPLE, FAST AND EXCITING. • USE THE FLASHIEST locations, THE MOST EXCITING character concepts AND A SELECTION OF PLOT TWISTS THAT KEEPS EVERYONE ON THEIR TOES."

PULL OUT
AND KEEP

The fourteenth in a series of
collectable encounters presented in

#14

arcane

by Jo Walton & Graydon Saunders

"I hate these headwrapping parabolic full peripheral vision screens. Especially the ones that flex to track the focus of your eyes.

<Access identification confirmation for Commodore the Most Honourable Sir Everet Antoine Jourdain haut-de-Wurland>

<File access privilege Alpha-Blue confirmed... Accessing file Fins Up >

<skytrack data academic post-processing trajectory track for variable -8 to -12 magnitude object 53/09/17; object designated 2053-TNK-e. Trajectory extrapolation indicates Solar orbit, .8 AU perigee 1.8 AU apogee, 19.6 degree inclination, orbital period 428 5 days, full Keplerian elements uncertain at this time.>

Extremely uncertain – the object has been observed to manoeuvre, but this computer doesn't have the security clearance to be told that.

<Initial orbital analysis indicates probability of object impact to known inhabited platforms/rocks/spinners to be acceptably low (50 year extrapolation, -8 sigma event); planetary impact probability effectively zero. Hypothesised erratic extreme variation in object albedo due to recent fracture of a large, rapidly rotating ice-bearing body; Lunar University research vessel Blue Dolphin launched 53/10/01 for analysis of the fracture mechanism, refinement of orbital data, and composition assay.>

Do let's not forget the composition assay. Luna is always thirsty.

<Blue Dolphin in com-condition Zulu-Red since 53/12/14; no transponder, no ping. Failure of optical track 53/12/17. No further data available. Click any numerical indication for full abstract of supporting analysis.>

Which won't tell me anything I don't already know. Damn. I want to stay much further away from this thing than I am going to have to get."

the gaming magazine arcane ENCOUNTER! FREE MONTHLY PULL-OUT

2053-T Deep

This month's encounter is ideal for any deep space campaign containing human settlements.

2053-TNK-e appears to be an asteroid, but in fact it is something much more exciting and far more dangerous. It is an alien artefact, a Von Neuman probe constructor, sent into the system by aliens for their own purposes. This encounter can be set anywhere where people are in space. The scenario assumes an inhabited solar system in 2053, but can easily be adjusted to fit any location as long as there are human settlements there. PCs' technology can be pitched at any level, from not much better than current space technology upwards, but it is assumed that they do not have nanotech and will have something to learn from the artefact.

2053-TNK-e

2053-TNK-e (for the year 2053, Type Not Known, fifth one found in that year) is a constructor for Von Neuman Probes. Using these probes is one approach to getting a lot of information about your local stellar neighbourhood; you send self-replicating machines to the nearer stars, where they make copies of themselves which proceed on to more distant stars. The individual probes don't have to go as far, and the material investment from your home solar system is lower. The complexity of the individual probes is much higher (making them more prone to failure and harder to build), so a variation on that approach is to send a specialised constructor to a more distant star, and have it build a group of simpler, one-shot probes to send on.

2053-TNK-e is just such a constructor. Because it was built by a civilization with a lot of zero-G and vacuum experience, and is completely automated, it is not a single, solid thing; instead, it is composed of six construction nodes (long spines, below which the probes are assembled), surrounded by a bewildering number of independent pieces of machinery. None of this stuff is materially attached; it all moves, apparently at random, although when it has collisions they are mediated by some sort of field technology, so that the two pieces stick together and rotate, switching places and then releasing, with the track of neither machine disturbed.

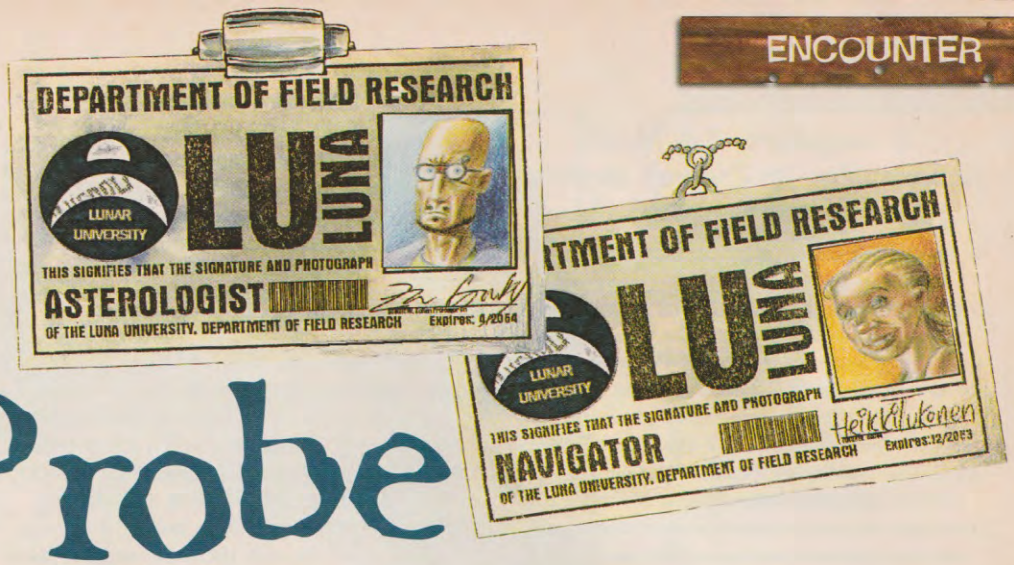
The entire constructor cloud is a low power radiation source (~50 watts) all across the electromagnetic spectrum, *if* you are within 50km of it. Outside that distance, nothing. The Navy really wants to know how that is done. Many of the signals are modulated; it would take a large number of cryptoanalysts a long time to figure out exactly what the encoding schemes are, although practically anyone with a good signal analysis computer can figure out the basic signal correlations – this particular warble means 'incoming transporter node', and so forth.

The entire constructor cloud moves. If it is actively building probes, it moves a lot to obtain the necessary raw materials. If it is in a quiet phase, it doesn't move much, although it will move to acquire particular

The System

You'll notice that, even though we present character descriptions for the people involved with 2053-TNK-e, we don't provide you with any stats. That's a deliberate decision – you're supposed to be able to use this encounter with all manner of deep space campaigns, and there's no way we could provide stats for all of them. That shouldn't be a problem for you – just make up the stats for these characters yourself, using the descriptions as a starting point. Same goes for other 'system' details – make them up to fit your campaign.

TNK-e: Space Probe



high priority raw materials (any organic chemicals, rare earth metals) for storage. Generally, though, the cloud does not change orbit a great deal.

2053-TNK-e is big. Each of the six constructor nodes is supported by several thousand subsidiary machines, and the total mass is in the neighbourhood of a million tons. This is part of what disturbs members of the Navy – having a million tons of stuff moving around so quietly that it is only detected passively, optically, and by chance bothers them a great deal.

Receptors, refiners, fabricators, assemblers, transporters and storage units make up the main types of subsidiary machine. Power is apparently by some sort of direct tap to something; anyone who can figure out how this works is going to make lots of money.

Receptors

5mx5mx0.5m squares, gold in colour. Generally found near the outside of the machine cloud. Receptors can join together edge to edge, and sometimes appear to orient themselves flat on to sunlight. Smooth and slippery, magnetic grapples don't work on receptors.

Refiners

3m dia.x11m cylinders, the centre 3m of their length bulges smoothly to a diameter of 6m, rather like a stick through a doughnut. One end of the cylinder has a conical depression and the other end has a variety of mechanisms for material transfer (plumbing connections, locks and grappling arms). Getting directly in front of the conical end is unwise – anything directly ahead and within 5m can be sliced up (by large lasers), hauled down the maw and refined. The lasers are designed to quickly cut up large nickel-iron asteroids, and it takes very impressive personal armour to stop them.

Fabricators

Cubes with no top or bottom, fabricators come in sizes from 5cm along an edge to 15m along an edge. The wall thickness tends to be about a fifth of the edge length. Getting inside a fabricator is a very bad idea – it sets off all sorts of alarms and bright lights, and gets whoever did it forcibly ejected by mechanical grapples or

Commodore the Most Honourable Sir Everet Antoine Jourdain haut-de-Wurland

Sir Everet is, well, lazy. Not stupid, not incompetent, not even inept, just lazy. He much prefers spending time near headquarters, living an easy life, to being crammed into tiny ship quarters and hurled through space. Unfortunately for him, he has sufficient family, political and service connections that his career is essentially immune to political manipulation – if he makes a real mistake, he can still get cashiered, but his career won't be sacrificed as a political gesture. This is why the Navy has sent him; it's expecting to find a dead ship and 30 dead Lunar University people, with no good explanation why, and another officer might have his career sacrificed to appease public opinion. Sir Everet is in late middle age, portly, suave and extremely knowledgeable. He will not make any clever deductions, however.

Quotes: "Look me up back on Ceres, we could have a few brandies together."

"Adventures are about somebody else having a bad time far away. I prefer a quiet life, when I can get it."

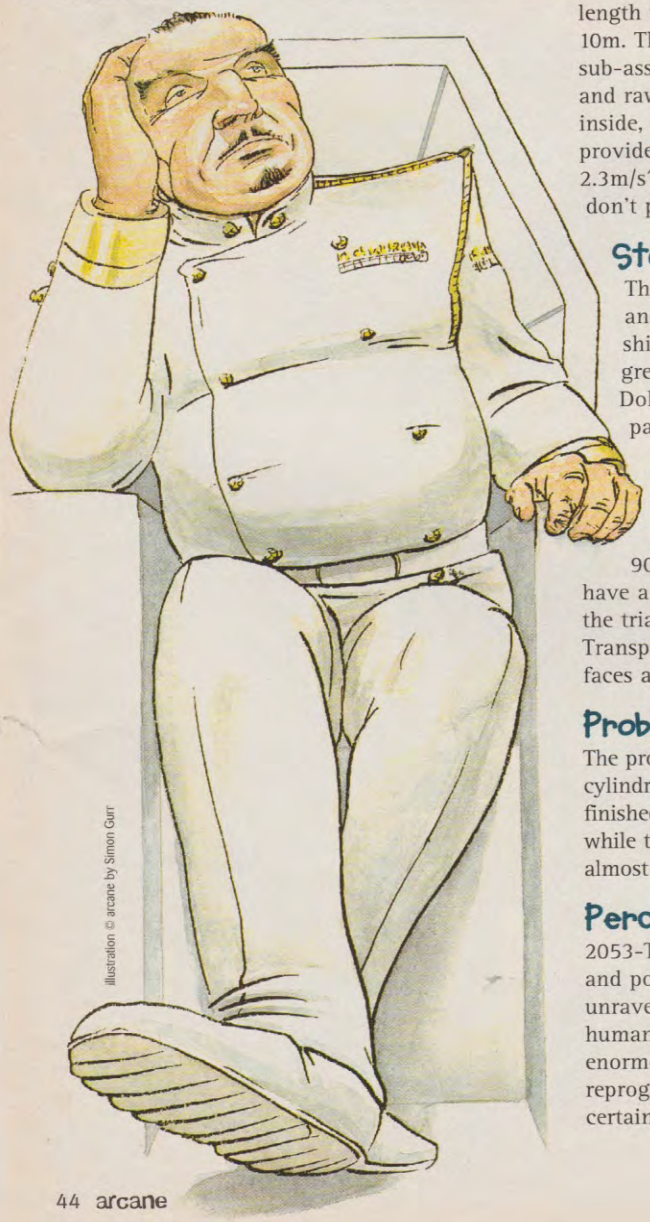


illustration © arcane by Simon Gurr

field technology. Larger fabricators tend to have smaller ones (providing sub-assemblies) docked to various points on their inside or outside surface, producing a somewhat bizarre cubist, spherical Christmas tree effect.

Assemblers

Spheres with a number of gripping parts floating near them, Assemblers do repair work on all the other components of the constructor (including other Assemblers), assemble the parts produced by fabricators both in the large fabricators and into the finished probes, and float around carrying specific devices with them. Assemblers have no material connection to their manipulator and gripping parts; the parts can be extended some distance (about 10 times the Assembler's diameter) from the Assembler itself. They come in a variety of sizes from 1mm in diameter to 10m.

Transporters

Half the skin of a cylinder with no ends, transporters range in size from 1 meter in length to 40, and in width from 10cm to 10m. They float about the cloud carrying sub-assemblies, sick subsidiary machines and raw materials from place to place. The inside, curved surface of a transporter provides a downward acceleration of 2.3m/s^2, making them easy to ride on. Just don't pick one that's headed for a Refiner.

Storage

The storage nodes come in all shapes and sizes. Many are spherical, all are shiny and they come in silver, blue, green, red and bright pink. If the Blue Dolphin's crew is alive (see scenario – page 50) it'll be in a blue one.

Construction

Equilateral triangular prisms, 5m along the edges of the triangle and 90m long, the construction nodes will have a probe forming beneath one face of the triangle. Fabricators, Assemblers and Transporters will dock to the other two faces all along their length.

Probes

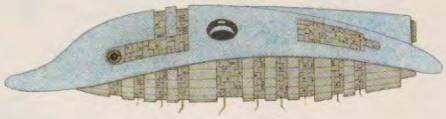
The probes themselves are vaguely cylindrical, 30m in diameter and 85m long. A finished probe could conceivably be launched while the PCs are investigating – this is almost bound to be a spectacular event.

Perceived Value

2053-TNK-e contains a great deal of novel and powerful technology. If this can be unravelled, understood and applied to human purposes, the potential value is enormous. If the object can be reprogrammed in the meantime, that's certainly potentially useful, too.

Ships

Blue Dolphin



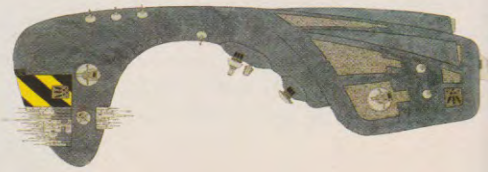
University of Luna research vessel – there is accommodation for 40 passengers, but it is generally not used to full capacity to allow extra equipment to be carried. Fairly slow, long endurance, medium delta-v (at least 8km/s, whatever tech is being used, so chemical propulsion is probably not a possibility), an excellent (and variable with time) sensor suite, much of it lab equipment being used for the current research. It has a crew of ten – captain, navigator, engineer (drives), engineer (ship's systems), engineer (environmental systems), hydroponicist, systems specialist, second systems specialist, medtech, fabricator.

Uriah Heap

A naval logistics auxiliary, Uriah Heap is large enough to grapple and move Blue Dolphin. It has a small crew (25 or so) as the regular complement, but Commodore Jourdain may well have extra personnel aboard – marine extraction teams and a number of specialists to examine the Dolphin and object. Light-loaded, Uriah Heap has impressive acceleration and handling characteristics. Full load, acceleration is a great deal slower and handling is considerably more sluggish, but total delta-v remains high. As an auxiliary it's not significantly armed, with light defensive armament only. Short notice installation of an offensive armament fit is not possible because it would be far too difficult to tie the weapons into the ship's existing sensor system.

Hengist

No-one in the main mission is aware that Hengist is there. Sir Everet (Commodore



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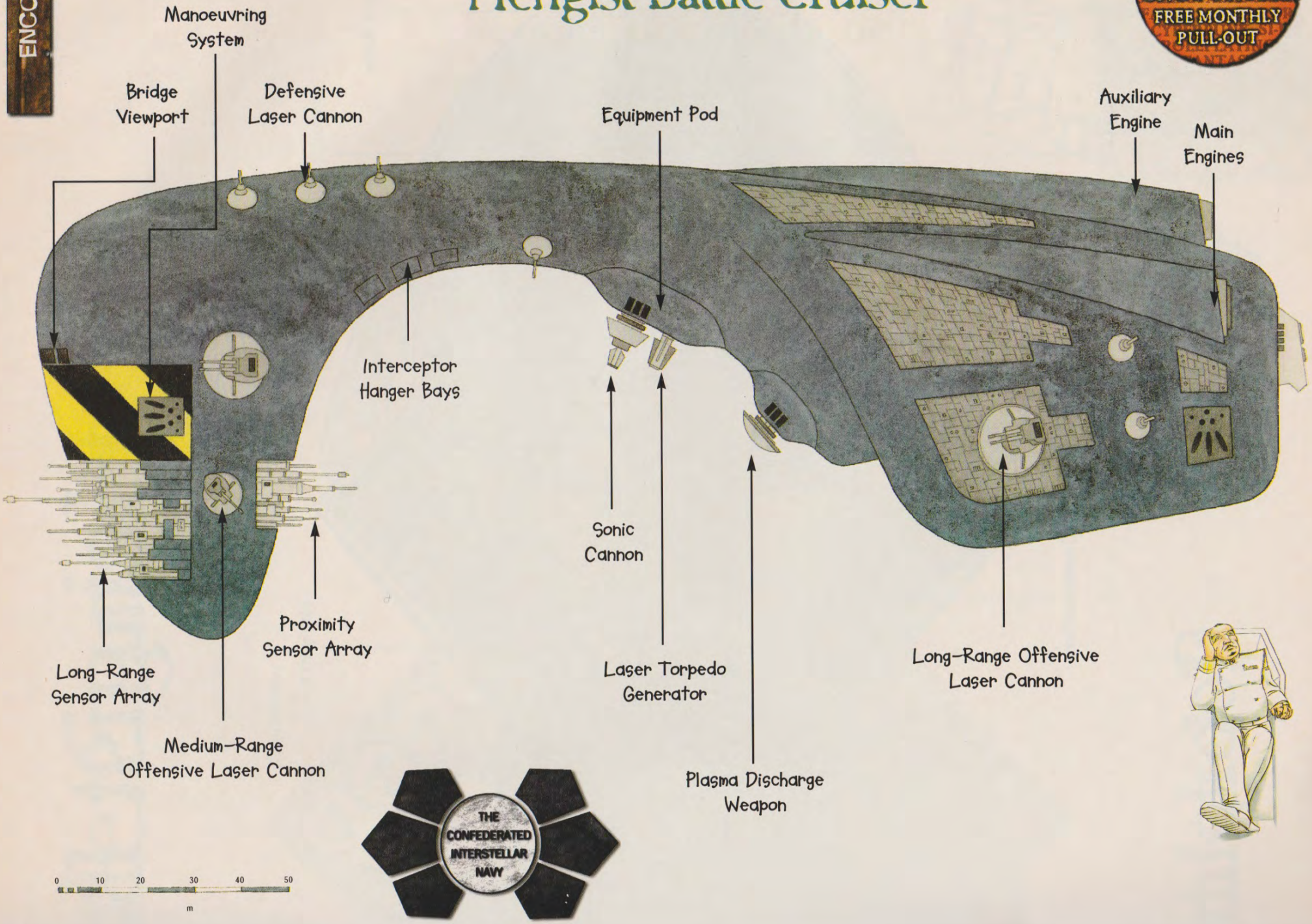
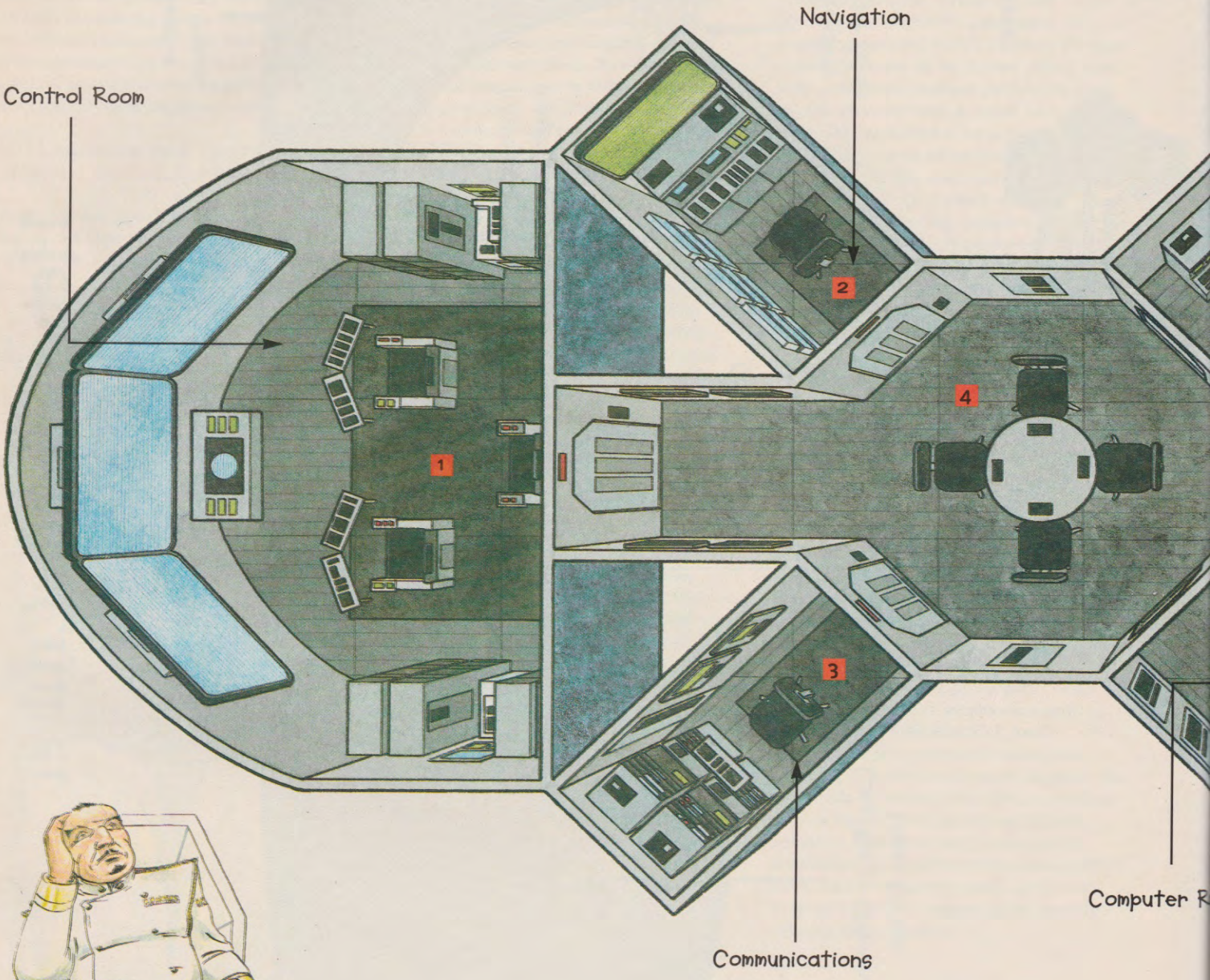
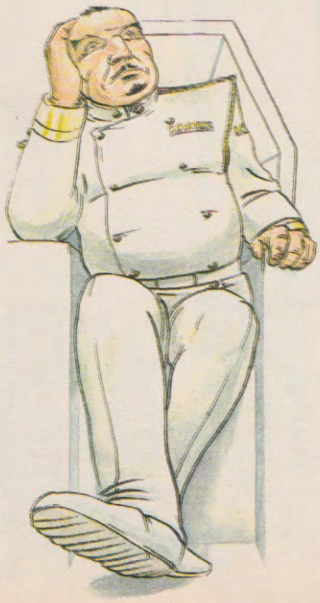
Hengist Battle Cruiser



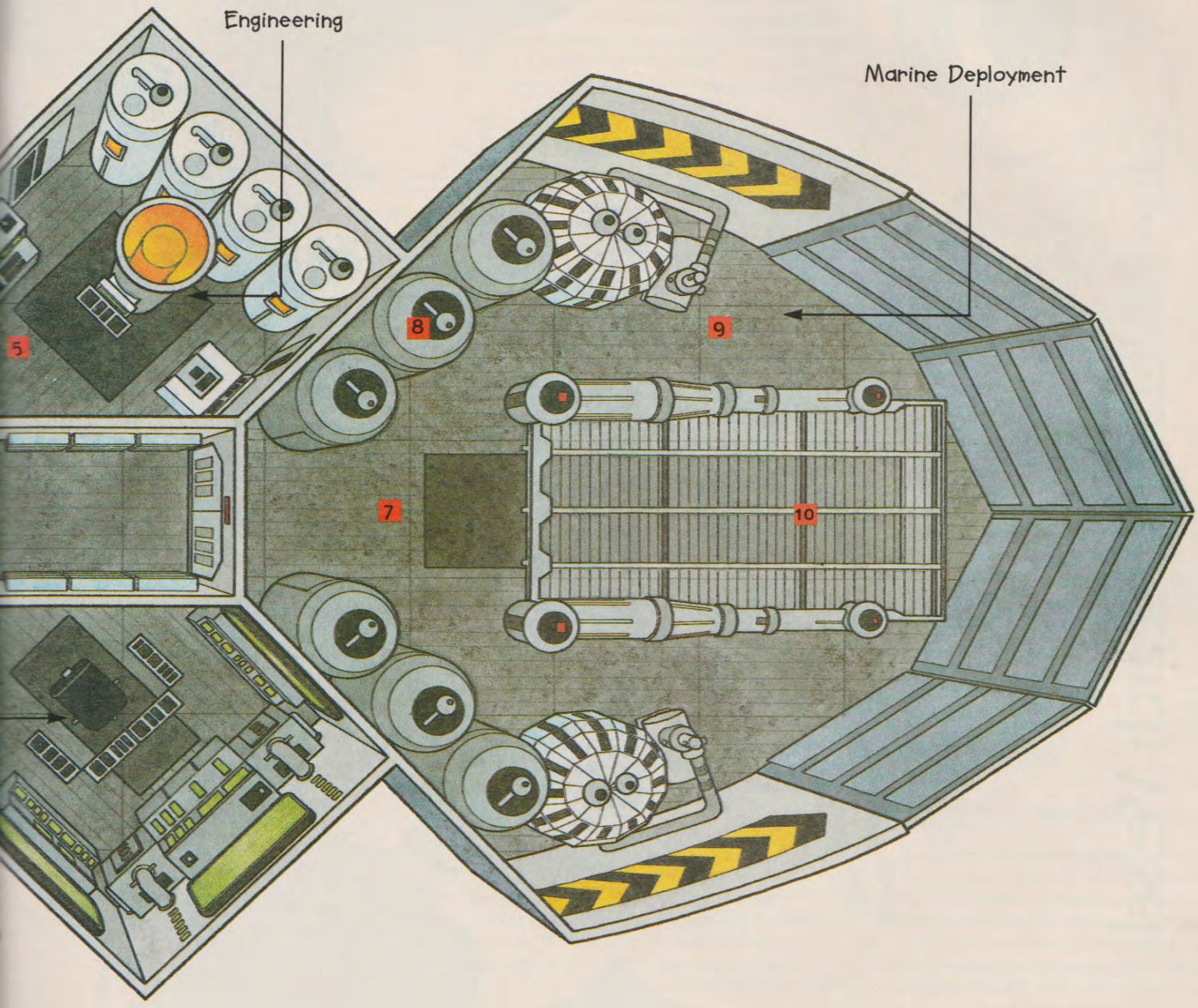
Hengist Ba





floorplan

ttle Cruiser

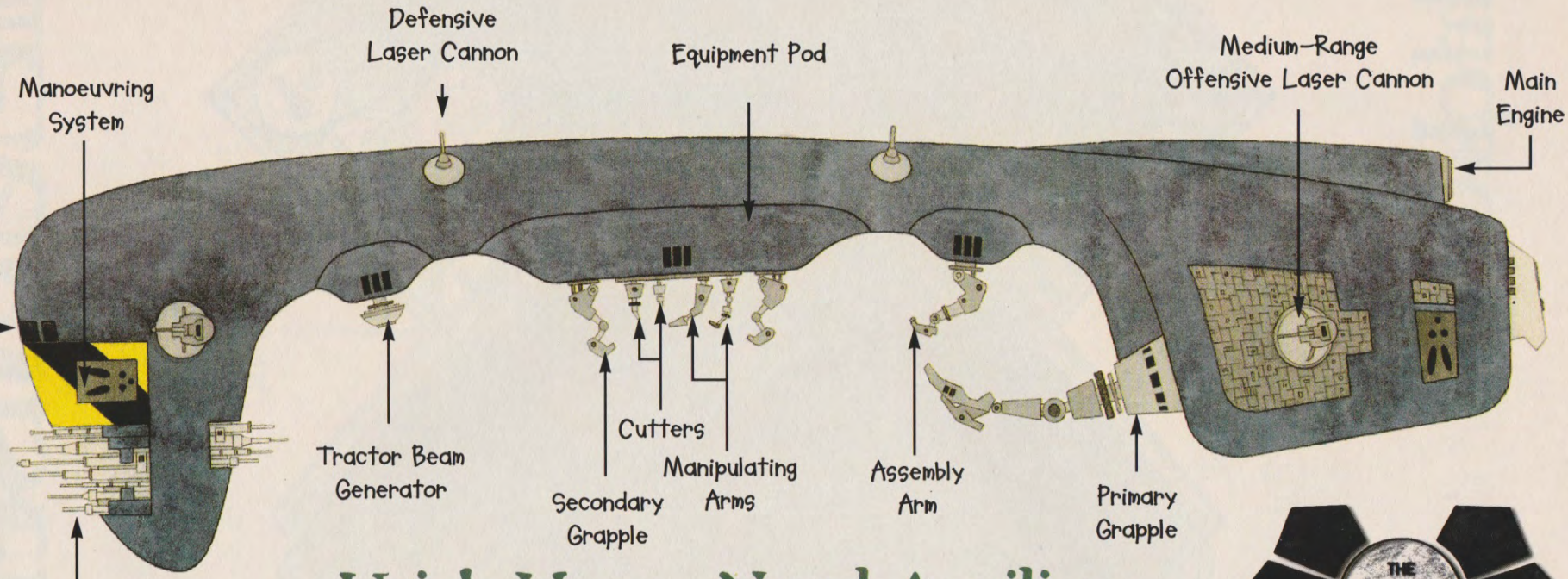


deck 1

THE CONFEDERATED INTERSTELLAR NAVY

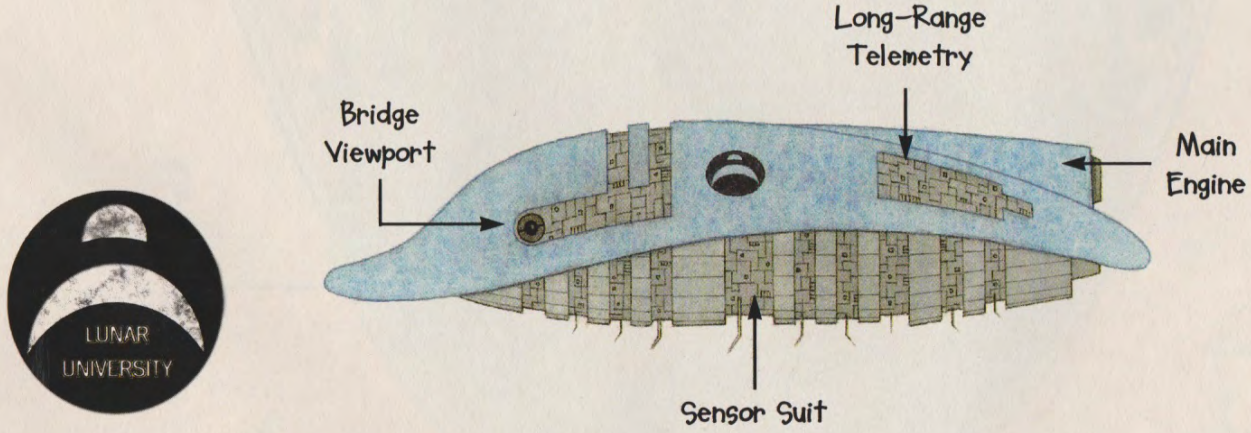
1 BRIDGE
2 NAVIGATION OFFICER
3 COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER
4 OFFICERS' MEETING ROOM
5 ENGINEERING ROOM
6 COMPUTER ROOM
7 DEPLOYMENT HANGER
8 MARINE DROP TUBES
9 AIRLOCK MACHINERY
10 HYDRAULIC RAMP

maps © arcane illustrated by Keith Jackson



Uriah Heap - Naval Auxiliary

THE CONFEDERATED INTERSTELLAR NAVY

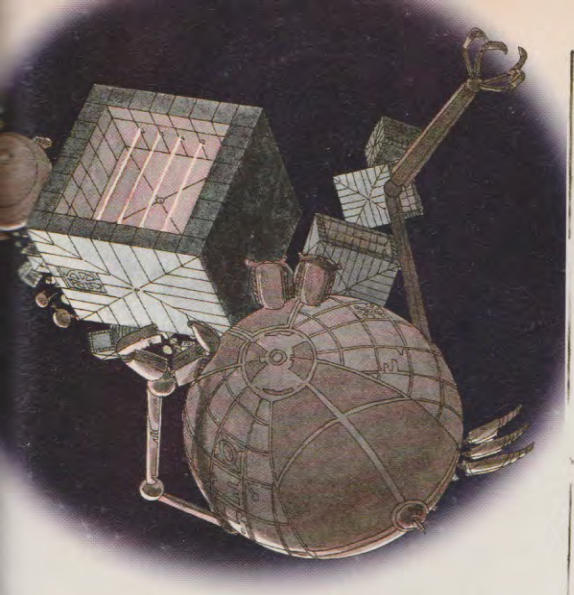


LUNAR UNIVERSITY

Blue Dolphin - Research Vessel

0 10 20 30 40 50
m

ENCOUNTER

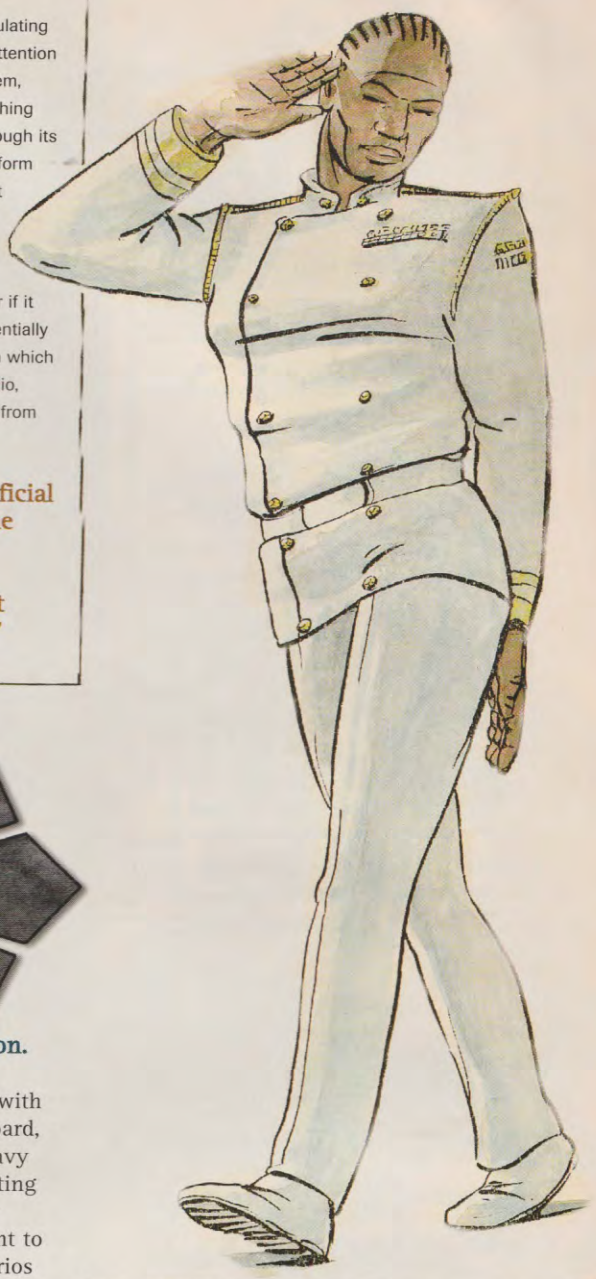


Control

Control is the central artificial intelligence manipulating the Probe. It is a true AI, but is not paying much attention to anything other than its purpose in the system, constructing probes. If it is convinced that the thing bothering it is an intelligent species, it will run through its procedures – sending off a message 'home' to inform its makers and initiating first contact sequences. It is quite happy to be friendly to any 'aliens' it meets, but will not give up technical data except in trade. If it does not consider the infuriating infestation evidence of intelligence, or if it becomes convinced that they are hostile and potentially dangerous, it has formidable armour available with which to fight back. Control can be contacted by radio, computer signal or by ordinary communications from inside storage.

Quotes: "I am actually an alien artificial intelligence. But you can call me Control if you like."

"I always wanted to be the first intelligence to discover aliens."



Jourdain) knows that there is military backup he can call for, but he only knows where the communication relay is, he doesn't know anything about the nature of the backup or its orders. Hengist is a battle cruiser. It has a large crew (200 people, plus marines), is heavily armed, very fast and capable of sustained independent operations. If the object is determined to be alien and hostile, whether by Hengist or Sir Everet, Hengist has been tasked with destroying it, whether or not that means destroying Uriah Heap or the Blue Dolphin too. (It is of course preferred that the Lunar University people be rescued safely. Their presence is not considered sufficient reason to prevent Hengist from firing, however.)

Hengist has a significant marine complement, but is primarily an anti-ship platform (the marines are there to do boarding), and armed as such. There are no light weapons aboard, nothing at all between small arms and large ship killer beam weapons and nukes, so if Hengist starts shooting, there will only be a large enough mess to splash on those who are fairly near it.

Organizations

There are at least three organizations very concerned with recent events: the system's

The university's emblem.

The emblem of the naval corporation.

traffic control people (who have a ship with a known location, with 30 people on board, that's acting electronically dead), the Navy (which has separate observations indicating that 2053-TNK-e has manoeuvred; only about 400m/s worth, but this is sufficient to have its potentially-hostile-aliens scenarios running, and security paranoia at an all-time high), and the Lunar University, which may have just lost 30 people and an expensive research ship.

Additionally, if word of the loss or potential loss of the Blue Dolphin has leaked to the press or the families of those aboard, there will be considerable public pressure to provide an immediate answer concerning the health and well being of those aboard.

Any group – space manufacturing consortium, private or public researcher, prospector or otherwise – which thinks it can make a profit from the discovery will be trying to get as much as possible from it. This includes media interest, politicians attempting to advance their agenda by manipulating the public reaction to the discovery, and groups worried about their market losses if new technology becomes widely available.

Captain Amelia Fitzurse

Captain Fitzurse commands the Hengist ship. She has orders to follow, to wait and to listen, unless and until there is clear evidence of hostile intent from the object, in which case she is to turn it into plasma with the utmost speed. If she can manage to rescue anyone requiring help before doing this, all well and good. If she can't, oh well. Amelia Fitzurse is a tall, solidly built, plain woman in her middle age. She is extremely competent, thoroughly driven and escapes being a complete martinet by comprehensive common sense and practicality. Her crew does not like her, but it trusts her utterly and will follow her anywhere. She has this job because no-one in the Navy hierarchy is in the least doubt that she will carry out her orders. Amelia always gets the job done, no matter what the cost.

Quote: "Come on now, no slacking on the ship."

Heikki Tukonen

Heikki is the Finnish navigator of the Blue Dolphin, a tall, cheerful, blonde girl. She was one of the original landing party sent into the constructor when Blue Dolphin arrived. She is adventurous, enthusiastic and only 17 years old. Heikki is a qualified navigator but this is her first important job, having graduated from the University of Luna Navigation School only a few months ago. She has considerable zero gravity and low gravity experience, and has adjusted to her new status without much trouble.

Quote: "Take me to your leader!"

Scenario

Investigation

The party is sent on a mission to investigate the 2053-TNK-e and discover what happened to the Blue Dolphin. When the party members reach it they discover that it is not an asteroid at all. Whether they are on their own ship or aboard the Uriah Heap they should go in and investigate, seeking to rescue the crew of the Blue Dolphin and discover anything of interest they can pick up along the way.

Sir Everet will be delighted to send the PCs in alone if he believes he can trust them. This will depend on how they have behaved on the trip so far. Otherwise he may accompany them. They will have to get into the constructor, find the Blue Dolphin's crew or good evidence that they won't be found, and get back out again. This is likely to be challenging.

Going In

On their way into the cloud that is the constructor, the party is likely to tangle with some of the subsidiary components. Some of them look odd enough and have sufficient volition that the party may even believe they are aliens in vacuum suits. The things are programmed to defend themselves unless Control is convinced that the invaders are peaceful and intelligent. If they get into combat they will have the following problems...

Zero G Combat is all about surfaces to be attached to, bounce off or not bounce off – coming loose off the hull of a ship is a very bad thing indeed if you have nothing above it to change your vector with.

In 2053-TNK-e there are lots of things to bounce off, but most of them are very hard to stick to, all of them are moving – not just forward, but rolling and tumbling – and many of them react to energy discharges (generally by turning on the equivalent of fire safety equipment; attempts to fire small arms will generally not work a second time, because the energy discharge is shunted elsewhere).

Anyone who's being extremely destructive will be subject to swarming by Assemblers which will attempt to disassemble them. If that doesn't work they will start receiving thermal energy at about a megawatt per second (that's 1,000 times normal bright summer sunshine, added directly as heat – almost anything will melt extremely quickly).

Characters can be declared dangerous debris by the co-ordinating computer (repeated energy discharges practically guarantee this), and either transported to the edge of the cloud and tossed away with a considerable velocity vector or refined. Things obviously organic will be refined (unless they've impressed Control that they are intelligent beings who should be talked to, rather than componented).

- Receptors are immune to energy weapons. They will happily absorb all the output you care to fire into them.
- Refiners can take a fair bit of punishment (one good hit with a small anti-ship laser) and then explode spectacularly, taking everything in a 80m radius sphere with them.
- Fabricators just break, scattering little bits of this and that in all directions.
- Assemblers will try to take you apart if fired at (and they're plenty bright enough to undo the air hoses first). If hit they go reflective, whether hit with projectile weapons or energy beams. They can cope with pretty much any small arm, but heavy, crew-served weapons will cause them trouble. Broken Assemblers fragment, but do not explode. Anyone caught by the expanding shell of parts may not appreciate this distinction.
- Transporters crumple into a small ball when destroyed (repeated small arms hits, one good hit with a crew-served weapon). This is accompanied by a gamma and x-ray radiation flux about 20% lethal on unshielded humans within two days (inside 100 meter radius).
- Storage units rupture when fired into and spill their contents in the process. Some of the contents is bad stuff (eg. liquid ozone), and the hot pink ones are antimatter storage facilities – you don't want to break those (it would take nuclear weapons or heavy ship-mounted weaponry to do that).
- The constructor units similarly require nuclear weapons or heavy ships' lasers to destroy or damage. Finished probes carry about 15 tons of antimatter – blowing them up has a tendency to be spectacular.

Subsidiary machine frequency

	fringe	middle	central	total numbers
receptor	01-05	01	-	60 000
refiner	06-08	02-05	01	6 000
fabricator	-	06-07	02	120 000 (many small)
assembler	-	08	03-05	60 000 (""")
transporter	09	09	06-07	18 000
storage	10	10	08-10	24 000

What's going on?

The constructor has disassembled the Blue Dolphin and used it as a source of raw

materials. It has also disassembled the crew, in the advanced emergency medical facilities, and converted them into aliens. Very confused aliens. This was the only way the AI could keep them alive until a rescue mission arrived, once the ship was disassembled, which was done by automatic systems. The crew members are alive but not exactly well. The party should encounter them before interacting with Control. (If necessary it could take Control some time to understand the protocols and codes, and work out a contact procedure.) The crew members know that they look like aliens, and can still speak human languages after a fashion, but with some difficulty. The first person to be encountered will be Heikki Tukonen, whose sense of humour will lead to her first words being, "Take me to your leader".

What exactly the crew members are like as aliens will depend on the particular system you're playing and the degree of difficulty required. They should be adapted to zero gravity – radial symmetry would be interesting. They should definitely look alien, but should resemble something which people could plausibly be converted into, rather than looking like 'true' aliens.

Objectives and Reasons

The Navy wants:
to ensure there is no danger to the system
to get as much interesting tech as it can
to look good in the press

The Lunar University wants:
to get its people back
to get the Blue Dolphin back
exclusive research rights on this fascinating alien thing

Sir Everet wants:
to get back to polite society
to do a job that won't be criticised
to do both of these things soon

Everybody else wants:
as much profit as they can get
to be reassured that they won't be invaded by a bunch of aliens
to have someone to blame if people die

And the PCs...
You need to be clear on what the PCs want before the adventure starts.

Adventure Seeds

For the Future

Of course, the thing *is* a probe constructor – it is certainly programmed to contact its builders when aliens find it. If the builders are still there, a full trade delegation, invasion fleet, or anything in between may show up at some point in the future.

In addition to that, Control will continue to buzz the thing about the solar system manufacturing probes and trading information with the humans. It can become a healthy part of the solar economy – until the builders show up, that is.

Other Possibilities

Depending on the desired scenario type, one of three things has likely happened to the crew members of the Blue Dolphin...
1: they're componented, too; gone completely.
2: they're there, but dead or surviving (barely) in their suits, if the suit technology is good enough to support that for however long it takes (most likely at least three weeks) for the rescue and recovery ship to match trajectories.
3: they're safe, inside, having been put into temporary pressurized life support by the constructor's emergency systems. It might not be the right kind of life support (being designed for aliens), but it is likely to involve a water-oxygen biosphere, so the Blue Dolphin's crew and passengers might still be alive in there somewhere. Or they might not – they might have fallen victim to any number of subtle biological problems due to too much UV light, too much (or not enough) water, toxins in the food, and so on.

Various things that 2053-TNK-e might contain:

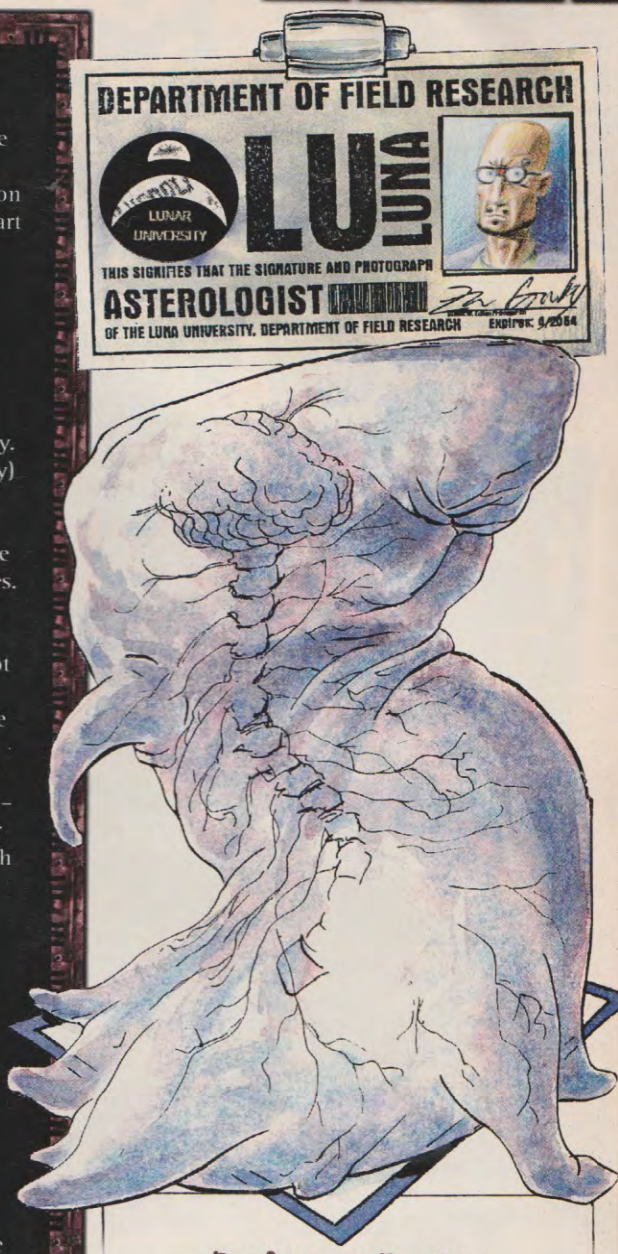
- Faster-than-light comms equipment.
- Faster-than-light drives.
- Direct manipulation of matter in order to create antimatter.
- Field technology of all kinds – single atom extraction and placing for building circuits or refining asteroidal materials, for example. In a culture without antigravity, the directed acceleration fields used by the transporters will doubtless be very interesting. Even in a culture with antigravity, the reactionless drives and the precise mechanism of the directed acceleration field will be of interest.

Recommended reading for extra atmosphere

Brin, David *Lungfish* (in *The River of Time* collection)
Bujold, Lois McMaster *The Warrior's Apprentice; The Vor Game; Falling Free*
Cherryh, C. J. *Downbelow Station; Merchanter's Luck* and *Hellburner*

Next month

In issue 15's Encounter we try our luck at the MegaCasino – out on Friday 27th December.



Professor Doctor Zoltan Goswicky

Professor Goswicky would be called a geologist if he studied planets. Instead, he's an asterologist. He studies small bodies – comets, asteroids and other drifting hunks of rock – a profession that combines geology, cosmology and materials science. He is the chief of investigation (boss scientist) aboard the Blue Dolphin. He is in his late middle age, fit (from spending a lot of time in spacesuits – the effort involved is a lot like being a deep sea diver, good exercise and lots of it), very smart and a little obsessive. He wants to take the universe apart to find out how it works, and he's made a good start. Unfortunately he's an asterologist, rather than a technologist, so he's out of his depth with what the object actually is.

Quote: "The implications really are quite fascinating."

Now, of course, he's been converted into an alien. His personality hasn't changed, but his body, unfortunately for him, has. See the scenario on the left.

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Issue 5 had Richard Garfield's ideas on *Netrunner*, reviewed *Vampire: The Dark Ages* and the Train pulled into our Encounter.

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MIRAGE ESSENTIAL TIPS!

You've read the review, bought the cards and now you need some expert advice on deadly combos. David Cornford has got a few suggestions. In many ways Mirage (arcane 13, 9/10) represents a new chapter in the game of Magic: The Gathering. With revolutionary abilities such as Flanking and more importantly Phasing, a duel will never be the same again. So how do you use these new cards to your advantage? Simply read on to find out how to destroy your opponent...

Celestial Dawn
All nonland cards you own that are not in play are white. All nonland permanents you control are white. All lands you control are plains. All colored mana symbols in all costs on all of these cards and permanents are ✱.
Arcades Sabboth
Summon Elder Dragon Legend
Flying
As long as they are not attackin
untapped creatures you contro
+0/+2.
During your upkeep, pay ✱
bury Arcades Sabboth.
✱: +0/+1 until end of turn
Illus. Edward Beard, Jr.
7/7
Cloak of Invisibility
Enchant Creature
Enchanted creature gains phasing and cannot be blocked except by Walls.
"Useful . . . if you can find it."
—Pashad ibn Asim, Suq'Ata trader
Illus. John Coulthart

The Legend of the White Dragon

• **Celestial Dawn** from *Mirage* morphs every card both in your hand and in play to white, and each mana symbol as well as every land you control to a plain. But how exactly can you use this to your advantage? Ever gazed longingly at those golden legends such as an Elder Dragon Legend, then despaired over the ridiculous mana combinations they need to be cast?

First cast **Celestial Dawn** to turn all the mana needed to plains, then grin like the proverbial Cheshire cat as you lay your **Arcades Sabboth**. Then how about casting **Cloak of Invisibility** (a *Mirage* blue instant) so that your stompin' Dragon gains phasing. Okay, so your Dragon can only attack every other turn, but you avoid paying the upkeep each turn, and when it does phase-in not only do all of your untapped – non-attacking – creatures gain +0/+2, but Arcades can only be blocked by flying walls! Still not happy? For a white mana – which you now have stacks of – you can pump Arcades up from 7/7 to, well, does it really matter? Just beware of those **Glooms** and **Flashfires**.

Tawnos's Wand
Artifact
2, ⟳: Target creature with power no greater than 2 becomes unblockable until end of turn. Other effects may later be
Instill Energy
Enchant Creature
Target creature can attack the turn it comes into play on your side.
0: During your turn, untap target creature Instill Energy enchants. Use this ability only once each turn.
Illus. Dameon Willich

OUCH!

• **Sabretooth Cobra** is one of those annoying 'poison' critters that always seem to pop up when you have no way to block them, and you end up accumulating those poison counters that spell game over when they reach ten. Old fangs has a nasty bite though, if she damages a player they must pay 2 mana during their upkeep or gain another poison counter.

Here's how to make her nastier still. Bring **Tawnos Wand** (an artefact from *4th Edition*) into play just after summoning your cobra – pay the two mana and activate the wand to make the snake unblockable until the end of the turn, then slap the highly useful **Instill Energy** on it. Now Sabretooth can attack twice the same turn she's summoned and cannot be blocked either time, giving your opponent two poison counters. Now for the tasty bit – unless they now pay 4 mana (2 for each strike) they gain 2 more counters during their upkeep. Tap those land or game over in 3 rounds.

Sabertooth Cobra
Summon Cobra
If Sabertooth Cobra damages a player, he or she gets a poison counter. During that player's next upkeep, he or she gets another poison counter unless he or she pays 2 before then to prevent this effect. If any player has ten or more poison counters, he or she loses the game.
Illus. Andrew Robinson
2/2

UNDEADENOUGHT

Phyrexian Dreadnought
Artifact Creature
Trample
When Phyrexian Dreadnought comes into play, sacrifice any number of creatures with total power of 12 or more, or bury Phyrexian Dreadnought.
Illus. Pete Venters
12/12

Shallow Grave
Instant
Put the top creature card from your graveyard into play as though it were just played. That creature is unaffected by summoning sickness. Remove the creature from the game at end of any turn.
Good help is hard to dig up.
Illus. John Coulthart

• Sacrificing creatures which together amount to 12 points or over in strength to bring **Phyrexian Dreadnought** into play is rather nasty and pretty unlikely until the latter stages of a game. Instead of killing off all of your creatures simply discard the Dreadnought, then cast **Shallow Grave**. Before your opponent can say, "What's that then?" this black *Mirage* instant brings Phyrexian back from your graveyard directly into play without summoning sickness. Now that 12/12 trampler doesn't look too bad, does it? (Okay, it only lasts for one turn, but come on, you only paid two mana for it!)

UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Ivory Gargoyle
4 ✱
Flying
If Ivory Gargoyle is put into the graveyard from play, put it into play under owner's control at end of turn and skip your next draw phase.
4✱: Remove Ivory Gargoyle from the game.
Illus. Quinton Hoover
2/2

Ravenous Vampire
Summon Vampire
Flying
During your upkeep, sacrifice a nonartifact creature and put a +1/+1 counter on Ravenous Vampire, or tap Ravenous Vampire.
Eternal life brings eternal hunger.
Illus. John Bolton
3/3

• Contrary to what the rulebook states, black and white can make quite a deadly combination when used well together. It doesn't get much better than this handy two-card engine.

Ravenous Vampire is an expensive creature; 3 colourless and 2 black mana for a 3/3 flying Vampire. But if you sacrifice a non-artefact creature during your upkeep it gains +1/+1. What do you sacrifice? *Alliances* has the answer with the immortal **Ivory Gargoyle** which bounces back into play at the end of your turn whenever it visits the graveyard. Sacrifice the Gargoyle to the vampire to bring it to 4/4, bring the Gargoyle back into play at the end of your turn… and then do the same the next turn, and the next. Within a few turns you will have one huge headache ready to fly at your opponent – just watch as his jaw drops to the floor and grin like a mad thing.

STOP THAT DAMN PLAYING!

• Don't you just hate those artefacts? Ever lost a game to **Black Vise** or **Millstone**? Not anymore. This combo is child's play but ridiculously effective. If you thought **Joven's** (a red legend from *Ice Age*) artefact destroying ability was good, you'll love the new **Goblin Tinkerer** from *Mirage*. A colourless and a red mana to cast for a 1/2 goblin who destroys artefacts for one red mana! There's only one drawback – the artefact deals damage equal to its casting cost back to the goblin, so anything other than a **Feldons Cane** kills your repeating **Shatter**. Or rather, it did until you slapped **Regeneration** on it! Now whenever your playful goblin breaks an artefact or it kicks the bucket in combat, it bounces back to you.

WHAT THE HELL IS... MAGIC The Gathering™

There are those of you, hard as is it to believe, who don't actually play *Magic: The Gathering*, the game for which *Mirage* is an expansion set. *Magic* was designed by the now legendary Richard Garfield (who has since designed the *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle, NetRunner* and *Battletech* collectable card games), and was launched by Wizards of the Coast in 1993.

Primarily designed as a game to be played at game conventions (being quick to play and highly portable), *Magic* quickly took off among games players in the States, spreading to Europe and, eventually, the rest of the world in the following year or so after its release. It's now the most popular collectable card game, like, ever, with more than two billion cards in circulation across the globe.

The basic premise of the game is that two wizards are facing each other off in a duel – a fight to the death. Using his collection of spells each wizard attempts to deplete the lifeforce of his opponent. Spells vary; there are those which summon creatures to attack the opposing wizard, or defend against the opponent's own creatures; there are 'direct damage' spells, such as the dreaded Fireball which creates a ball of, er, fire which can be directed at the opponent or at his creatures; there are healing spells, counter-magic spells, and a host of others.

Each card in a *Magic* deck represents one of these spells, or the land which creates magical energy to power them. Each player has a deck of approximately 60 cards which he has hand-picked from the thousands of available cards. Much of the skill in *Magic* lies in carefully constructing a deck with spells which work well together. These 'card combos' often mean the difference between winning and losing, which is exactly why we've constructed some suggested combinations using the new cards in the *Mirage* set on these four pages.

If you're interested in playing *Magic: The Gathering*, you can now get hold of it in most WH Smiths shops, Virgin Megastores and in specialist gaming shops where you buy your roleplaying kit.

WHAT THE HELL IS... MIRAGE

Every three to four months Wizards of the Coast launch an expansion set for *Magic: The Gathering*. These are collections of themed cards, with between 100 and 400 cards in the set. *Mirage* is the latest such expansion, only this is one of the larger 'stand alone' expansion sets. This means that there are a sizeable number of cards in the set (some 340) and that the cards are sold not only in 15-card 'booster packs' but in 60-card starter sets as well. These contain a copy of the *Magic: The Gathering* rules and the all-important land cards which are essential for play.

the gaming magazine arcane MIRAGE ESSENTIAL TIPS!

Ray of Command
Grave Servitude
Enchant Creature
You may choose to play Grave Servitude as an instant; if you do, bury it at end of turn.
Enchanted creature gets +3/–1 and is black.
"I no longer believe in a final resting place."
—Shauku, Endbringer
Illus. Adrian Smith

Death Ray

• Blue has got to be the most annoying colour of them all. It can counterspell you, **Psychic Venom** your land and even steal your most prized creatures. If you are a bluey then here's a simple twist on the popular **Control Magic** theme. **Ray of Command** gets you one of your opponent's critters until the end of turn – no matter what choose the one with the highest power and then cast **Grave Servitude** to beef it up by +3/-1. Then, just as your opponent looks forward to getting it back at the end of your turn sacrifice it to **Carrion**! You have now become the proud owner of a horde of 0/1 black creature tokens equal to the power of the sacrificed creature – +3 from **Grave Servitude**. If that's not nasty enough for you try the combo during your opponent's turn with **Grave Servitude** as an instant, and watch your opponent's face drop at those suddenly appearing blockers. There's no denying that this is one mother of a combination, so try it out.

Wizards Special

• **Urborg Panther, Feral Shadow** and **Breathstealer** are all pretty useful black creature cards in their own right. However, sacrifice them all and thanks to an in-built Wizards of the Coast combo you can search your library for **Spirit of the Night** and put it directly into play without spending its nine mana casting cost. Think it's expensive? Well, wait until your opponent hasn't got anything powerful enough to kill them, then attack with your black mob either dealing him a lot of damage or ridding yourself of a few pesky blockers. Then during his turn use the combo as a fast effect bringing an untapped 6/5 flying, trampling creature with protection from black that doesn't suffer from summoning sickness, and who gets first strike when attacking straight into play.

Breathstealer
Summon Night Stalker
: +1/–1 until end of turn
"As a child, I slept with a cloth over my face, to hide from the spirits that might pull the air from my lungs."
—Mosti, Femeref weaver
Illus. Cliff Nielsen
2/2
Feral Shadow
Summon Night Stalker
Flying
"The night stalkers are such a minor power in Urborg. Their sad eagerness to elevate themselves makes them willing tools in the plundering of little Femeref."
—Kaervek
Illus. Cliff Nielsen
2/1

Life in Death

• Black, red and green together can make an awesome deck, with deadly direct damage, powerful effects and brutal creatures. If you are playing such a deck then this combo is a must. Cast **Grim Feast** then target your opponent's most powerful creature and throw **Kaerveks Purge** on it. (If the creature isn't black, wait for a counterspell then complete the pain by casting **Armour of Thorns** as an instant on your opponents' beastie). The Purge destroys a target creature with a casting cost of X and deals your opponent damage equal to its power; +2 if you've used the Armour. As it hits the graveyard you can lick your lips as **Grim Feast** gives you life equal to that creature's toughness; again +2 thanks to the Armour. You take 1 damage next go from the feast, but it's worth it. Any self-respecting wizard fielding green keeps a **Lhurgoyf** hungrily stalking the graveyards. If you do, thanks to the Plague it just got a little bigger.

Armor of Thorns
Kaervek's Purge
Sorcery
Destroy target creature with casting cost equal to X. If that creature is put into the graveyard in this way, Kaervek's Purge deals to the creature's controller an amount of damage equal to the creature's power.
Illus. Richard Kane Ferguson

Lock Down

• The Stasis Deck is fast becoming one of the most popular and effective decks around. Here's a complementary combo to make that mana shorting deck a bit more potent. **Shimmer** is one of those nasty blue enchantments that targets your land. For two blue and two colourless mana all land of one type gains phasing! Now, to hurt your opponent even more cast **Kismet** on her then **Winters Orb** (a white enchantment and artefact from *4th Edition*). Not only does your opponent's land phase out every other turn, but when they phase back in again they do so tapped, and thanks to the orb she can only untap one of them. (If she is playing a multicolour deck simply add **Illusionary Terrain** to the combo so that all of her land is effected.)

Cursed Totem

• The new **Totem** artefacts from *Mirage* are going to become very popular, especially **Cursed Totem**, which for two mana prevents any creature from using a special ability that requires an activation cost. But how can you stop this one from hurting you as much as your opponent? If you have an **Icy Manipulator** handy – and if not, why not? – then you will already know the answer.

Cursed Totem
Artifact
Players cannot play any creature abilities requiring an activation cost.
Pass me from soul to soul / soldier to herder, herder to beast, beast to soil / until I am everywhere. / Then pass me those souls.
—Totem inscription (translated)
Illus. D. Alexander Gregory

Icy Manipulator
Artifact
1, Tap target artifact, creature, or land.
"The scavengers who first found it called it the 'Bone Crank.' Not a bad name, I'd say."
—Arcum Dagsson, Soldevi Machinist
Illus. Amy Weber

When you bring the Totem into play tap it with Icy. A bizarre move? Okay, so this turn nothing happens, but during your untap phase **Cursed Totem** comes alive once more, preventing any nasty creature-bound fast-effect to your army. At the end of your turn tap it again (the Manipulator is an artefact, so is unaffected by the Totem), and grin as you use your creature abilities to thwart whatever your opponent does.

And... There's even more

Issue 9 showed you how to improve your playing skills with *Alliances*.

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A Marriage Of

The adventurers pause in a clearing as the wild elf ranger checks the trail for tracks.

"Would someone like to remind me why we're tramping round this forest in the rain?" asks Fermeyer, the city-born thief, wiping rain from his face.

illustration © arcane by Dix

"We are searching for signs of the goblin war party that has been cutting down the trees in the sacred grove and raiding the elven villages," replies Armand, priest of the nature god, in an indignant tone of voice.

"But what are trees and elven villages supposed to mean to me?" spits Felspar the dwarf, rain collecting in his somewhat overgrown beard. "Why can't the tree-huggers fight for themselves like the rest of us?"

"The evil that these creatures represent must be destroyed," Tarlech states emphatically, the paladin's deep monotone reverberating across the clearing. Wringing a considerable amount of water from the sleeve of his drenched black robes, Widowmaker turns round to speak to Tarlech.

"Although death is one of my favourite things, dying needlessly and without good reason is something I'd really rather avoid if you don't mind," the dark-robed deathmage says somewhat sarcastically.

"Look, they went this way about an hour ago, you can see that the tracks are almost completely washed away," informs Wolfshadow as he straightens from his crouch by the trail.

"Well, I would like to remind you all that I'm only in this for the money," states Fermeyer petulantly as the party moves off down the trail.

Doug Allan gives some helpful hints on how to deal with a disparate party of adventurers whose individual motivations clash with the overall aim of the campaign structure.

A major problem encountered by all referees at one point or another is the natural incompatibility of campaign or scenario goals and the character's personal motivations. In the above example each of the character's reactions to the mission was coloured by his or her own perspective on life. Fermeyer would have preferred to be in an urban setting with plenty of pockets to pick and houses to burgle; Armand was there in his priestly role as a guardian of nature, but if he belonged to another religion he would have had a different outlook; Felspar resents having to fight for a race that has opposed his for millennia; Tarlech doesn't

INCONVENIENCE

care at all about the individuals involved, for him the cause is everything; Widowmaker believes in self-preservation, the accumulation of knowledge and personal power, so would prefer to be somewhere less dangerous (not necessarily to the party just to himself); and Wolfshadow is the only one with any motivation to complete the mission for the people involved. Occasionally the party members' personal motivations will coincide with the campaign goals, but for the most part they will be pulling them in different directions, so why should such a disparate party ever meet and decide to adventure together?

The referee needs to find a common motivation to keep the party together – this can be a single factor for the whole party or a collection of factors individually tailored to the party members. What follows is a list of suggestions to lend to a unified party.

For a few dollars more
The Mercenary Approach

The party is employed by an individual or group to perform certain tasks. The party may be employed by an alchemist to collect components and ingredients for his work, by the merchant's guild to protect the trade routes and hunt down bandits, or by many other possible patrons.

The rewards for the party would most commonly be in the form of a standard monetary payment, but alternatively rewards could include information, spells or items of special equipment.

Finders keepers
The Quest Approach

The party has a particular task (or tasks) to perform whether it is finding an ancient artefact, discovering a lost city, or perhaps rescuing a kidnapped prince. The players may have chosen to engage in the quest, but more often than not the quest will choose the players either in the form of a curse or geas brought about by the players' actions (or possibly their ancestors' actions), or as a manifest destiny either individually or as a party whole.

The rewards can be varied but are usually of a grandiose nature – saving the world, gaining a kingdom, destroying an ancient evil, saving the honour of your family, among others.

Church and state The
Civil Servant Approach

This approach has three options:

1: Religion

The characters are all members of one church or group of related beliefs – they work to forward the faith by converting new followers where possible, protecting the church, seeking relics, and destroying enemies of the church in crusades and holy wars. Rewards for dedicated service to the church include the inevitable monetary gain, but also lands and title, increases in position and personal power, and most important of all divine favour.

2: Armed service

The characters are conscripted into the country's armed forces and non-nationals can be drafted by judicious manipulation of the nation's laws. Conscripts will be expected to protect the nation's borders, clear hostile wilderness and fight against the enemies of the state. Rewards for service to the state are usually monetary in nature, but can include lands and title.

3: Penal servitude

The party members are all convicted criminals, whether justly or unjustly, and are forced into service on pain of death. The convicts are given the most dangerous missions to complete, and are often controlled by either magical or chemical means. The reward for penal servitude is freedom, normally.

Relative strangers
The Family Approach

The party members are related, some closely, some not so closely. This approach only works with single race or human/half-human parties (unless, of course, you want to get creative and have a human family adopt a dwarf or vice versa). The family group can right a grievous wrong done in the past or try to regain lost family lands and honour. Rewarding a family group is similar to any other group, but usually results in the gain of lands and title.

An offer you can't
refuse
The Threat Approach

Party members are under threat from something. It could be an invading army, a ravaging monster or maybe an 'incurable' plague. The party has to perform certain tasks to end the threat. This option works particularly well with a the quest approach (see left). The reward for defeating the threat is self-evident.

Nemesis
The Enemy Approach

This approach shares all of the features of the threat approach above, except the 'something' is replaced by 'someone', whether they be the kingpin of vicious crime, an insane mage or an ambitious ruler. As with the threat approach the rewards here are pretty obvious.

Let's take a look at the example at the start of the article and give each character a personal motivation.

- **Fermeyer (Enemy/Quest)**
The leader of the Thieves Guild has poisoned him with a slow acting toxin, and will give him the antidote in exchange for an elven artefact he must steal.

- **Armand (Family/Quest)**
Armand's grandfather was the druid priest of the sacred grove but unfortunately deserted the forest he was sworn to protect. Armand is destined to save the grove as penance for his ancestor's betrayal.

- **Felspar (Quest)**
His entire family was killed in an extremely vicious attack by a marauding band of goblins. He has spent the last five years hunting them down.

- **Tarlech (Church and State: Religion)**
The church has sent out paladins to clear the diocese of creatures of evil to allow expansion of the temple.

- **Widowmaker**
(Church and State: Penal servitude)
A necromancer, captured by Tarlech's church and geased to obey Tarlech's commands, whatever they may be.

- **Wolfshadow (Mercenary)**
An outcast from his tribe, he makes a living as a bounty hunter, collecting the current bounty on goblins.

Most individual goals will be chosen by the players themselves but some will have to be assigned to them by the referee – usually Penal Servitude but occasionally Threat and Enemy as well. In both cases the motivation can come about as part of character generation or during play, caused by character or party actions. Regardless of its origin, however, the motivation must always be discussed by the referee and the player(s) involved, because care must be taken not to alienate the players by enforcing 'negative' motivations too regularly or harshly. This will very often detract from the one thing you are trying to achieve above all – a unified party.

In the previous example both Fermeyer and, to a greater extent, Widowmaker could have had good reason to be concerned about the lack of freedom that their individual motivations gave them, but when those motivations were assigned by the referee they were explained to the players involved. As a result the players adapted their characters to fit the motivations and, more importantly, adapted the motivations to fit the characters. Fermeyer is already plotting his revenge on the Guild Master, a new Enemy goal; and Widowmaker, while obeying the letter if not the spirit of the paladin's commands, is searching for an effective way to break the geas, which is a new Quest goal.

If given individual goals a party will form a much stronger and more coherent whole, but more importantly every character will feel a personal motivation to complete each adventure and remain an important part of the group.

Taking leave of the happy elven villagers, the weak dawn light darting through the clouds, the adventurers head briskly north along the road to Friburg.

"That was a good day's work," announces Wolfshadow to no-one in particular as he hefts a small but rather heavy sack already staining brown from the drying blood of his many trophies.

"Justice will always triumph," states Tarlech looking sideways at Widowmaker who grins widely and waves back at him.

"I thought you were going to freeze their guards with your magic," asks a disgruntled dwarven voice. Turning to look at the limping Felspar, Widowmaker replies somewhat innocently,

"I did, didn't I?"

"Well, not until they had badly wounded our dwarf comrade," Armand hisses, his normally calm voice straining with the effort of supporting the dwarf.

"Don't blame me, unfortunately our illustrious leader wasn't very specific in his instructions," answers the necromancer with a barely concealed smile. "And I absolutely refuse to take any blame whatsoever for him losing his grip and charging straight into the goblin camp before we were ready," he jerks his thumb back in the general direction of Felspar.

"Hey guys, let's just get back to town shall we? I really want to sleep in a nice soft bed tonight," shouts Fermeyer from the rear of the group, the comforting weight of an ornately-carved wooden statuette lying against his hip as he jogs past the others.

The sound of voices grows softer and softer as the party disappears over the horizon.

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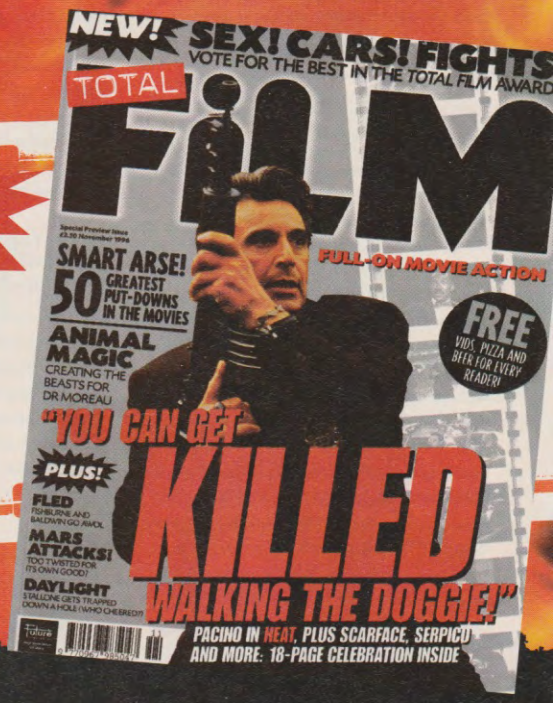

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ON CH 4 PAGE 621

The Icons

Each review in arcane is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Books And Supplements

Computer Games And Utilities

Dice games and expansions

Collectable card games and expansions

Roleplaying Systems

Board Games, Miniature Systems

The Scores

Everything reviewed in arcane gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

10/10
Perfect.
There's simply nothing better.

9/10
Excellent, a classic.
Highly recommended.

8/10
Very good, with few problems.
Recommended.

7/10
Good, but not exceptional.

6/10
Above average, but not without problems.

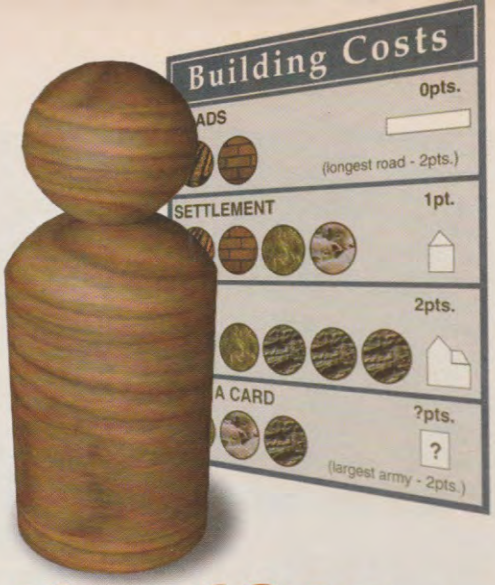
5/10
Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

4/10
Below average, but not without merit.

3/10
Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

2/10
Very poor, should be avoided.

1/10
Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.



the gaming magazine arcane reviews THIS MONTH

Settlers of Catan on page 62

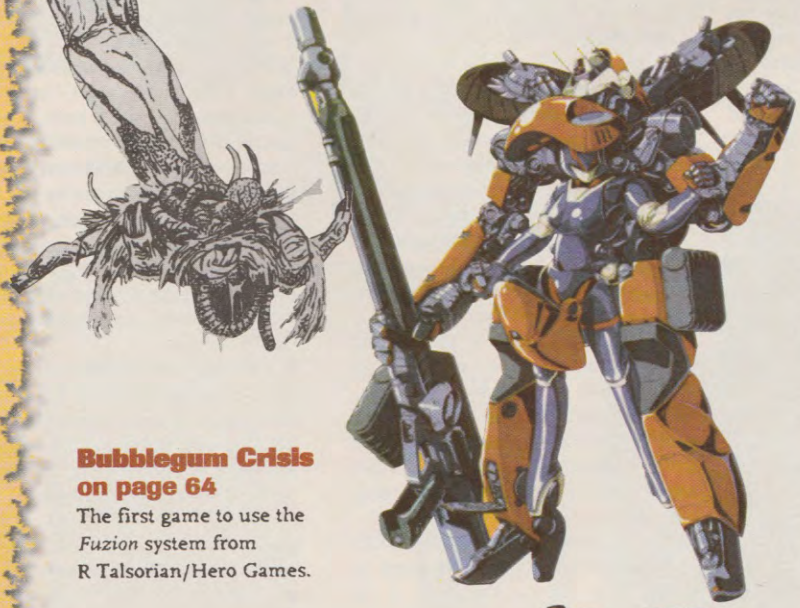
We've never played a board game this good – and we tell you just why it's so special in the month's lead review on page 62.

Horror's Heart review on page 71

A darker than dark campaign for the mighty *Cal of Cthulhu* is revealed – but can you survive it?

Inferno on page 68

It's like *BattleTech*, only it's set in Hell. Very strange indeed.



Bubblegum Crisis on page 64

The first game to use the *Fuzion* system from R Talsorian/Hero Games.

arcane SEAL OF APPROVAL

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

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The Settlers of Catan

is this the best board game in the world? probably.

AWARD WINNING
This game is a translation of the original *Die Siedlers von Catan* written by Klaus Teuber, which won the prestigious 1995 German 'Game of the Year' award.

It all started at Gaelcon (the friendliest games convention in the world™). On the Sunday morning, nursing a fairly severe hangover, myself and some of the other guests turned up to the main site a little after the convention had opened. The convention was in full swing, people were gaming left, right and centre. We felt a little surplus to requirements and sat down at one of the tables in the fantastic 17th century hall. James Wallis (top man at Hogshead publishing, producer of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay)* reached into his bag and produced a board game. "We could try this," he said. "I picked it up at GenCon, in America." The board game was *The Settlers of Catan.* Seven hours later he, Marc Gascoigne (the creator of *Judge Dredd,* the roleplaying game), John Tynes (Head Honcho at Pagan Publishing) and I were still sitting around the same table, and by this time we were playing our fifth game. Eventually the PA announced that the convention was closing for the day. We had to stop playing it. We didn't want to.

The Settlers of Catan is undoubtedly the most addictive and intriguing board game I have ever had the pleasure of playing. I am only finding the time to write this review because, although I tried to find some players for this evening, everybody I knew was busy. I spent a couple of hours sulking and then thought: "Well… I could write the review of *The Settlers of Catan* that I promised Andy." At least this way I still get to think about the game.

"If ever there was a game that would introduce friends or families to the joys of gamesplaying, this is it."

The Settlers of Catan has taken over my life. In idle moments I find myself thinking of new strategies, of better ways of playing the game, of new cards that could be introduced, of what it would be like with more than five players. I'm off my food. My lover's worried sick. And all because of a damn board game.

So what exactly is *The Settlers?* Well, it's unlike any board game I've ever seen, while at the same time having elements of lots of them. Have a look at the panel on the right called 'The Economics of Expansion', which will give you some idea of how to play the game, and then come back here.

Okay, so now you've got some idea of what I'm going to be talking about, let me explain to you just some of the reasons why *The Settlers of Catan* is the best board game I have ever seen. For the sake of space, I'm afraid these will have to be brief.

- The way it's laid out. Every game is different because of the random allocation of tiles.
- It takes just the right amount of time to play. A full game takes an hour and a bit. Long enough to really get into it, but not so long that you get bored if you're obviously losing.
- It encourages your creative side. Building your civilisation is an immensely satisfying thing to do.
- The robber moving from province to province nearly always targets the more common numbers, and this adds an evening-out effect to the random probabilities of the game.
- The number tokens are laid out in the same order every game, using an alphabetical sequence printed on their reverse side, which means that the distribution of probabilities is very even – you never get two sixes side by side.
- The desert tile, which produces nothing, appears in a random place every game and never receives a number token. This subtly shifts the distribution of the numbers, making each game slightly different.
- The placement of your pieces on the board is hugely important. Settlements must always have at least two sides of a hex in between them and this makes it possible to block off your opponent. This mechanic works very similarly to Go.

And there are a myriad of other reasons. Put most simply, this game is *elegant.* It's breathtakingly well designed and great fun to play. Do yourself a favour and get hold of a copy before Christmas. If ever there was a game that would introduce friends or families to the joys of gamesplaying, this is it.

CALLING ALL TRANSLATORS
There is an expansion set for the German game which lets you play with five or six players. And another that has several islands with trade in between them. Hopefully they'll soon be available in English.

BUY IT NOW!
If you can't find *The Settlers of Catan* in your local game store try one of the mail order companies that advertise in **arcane**. Esdevium Games of Aldershot supplied ours.

The Robber

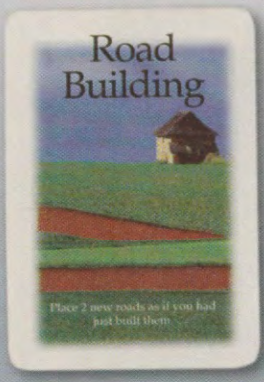
The nastiest thing in *The Settlers* is the robber. Close examination of the board will reveal that there are no '7's. That's because any time a seven is rolled, the player who rolls it gets to move the robber. The robber can be moved to any hex on the board. He prevents that hex from producing resources until he is moved again, and better yet he lets the player who moved him steal a card from any other player who has a settlement touching that hex. There are also Discovery Cards called Knights (they're the most common kind of Discovery Card), which can be played at any time on your go and enable you to use the robber in the same way.

The Economics of Expansion

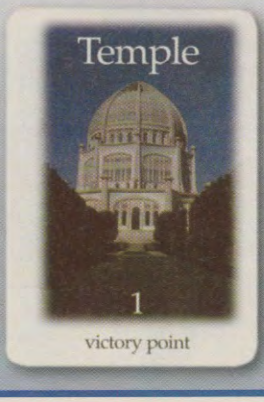
The basic mechanics of *The Settlers* are amazingly simple. The island to be settled is made up of 19 hexes, laid out as shown in the photo here. This is random, because the tiles are shuffled at the beginning of every game. Players take it in turns, and each turn they roll two six-sided dice. Whichever number comes up corresponds to the numbers on the board. If you have a settlement touching a hex whose number has just come up, it produces a resource card. There are five kinds of resource card, each produced by a different type of hex. These resource cards can also be traded with other players. Resources may also be traded at the ports you can see around the edge of the board, providing the player wishing to trade has a settlement there. They are used to build more settlements, roads or to upgrade settlements to cities. The first player to score ten victory points wins the game. You score victory points for having settlements, cities, the longest road and, in addition, there are Discovery Cards which may be purchased that can give you victory points.

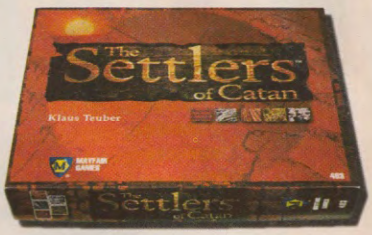
Resource Cards: Timber, Brick, Sheep, Ore and Grain – the five building blocks of the game.

Every player gets a handy **Building Costs** card that shows which resources you need to build with (amazingly). The card also has the victory points of each kind of building.



The **Discovery Cards** can be bought with resources. Some of these have a game use: the roadbuilding card lets you build two road sections, for example. Others count towards your total victory points and are kept secret until the end of the game.





VITAL INFO

title:	*The Settlers of Catan*
system:	a board game
price:	£24.99
publisher:	Mayfair Games
	001 708 647 9650
released:	out now
e-mail:	mayfair@aol.com
web site:	http://www.coolgames.com

and the players said...

PAUL: "Although seemingly simple, only when you play it do you realise its tremendous depth."

JON: "All the best bits from all the best games."

ANDY: "Without a doubt the best board game I've ever played."

also available...

There are a lot of board games around, although none are as good as this. *Risk*, *Diplomacy* and *Supremacy* all have some elements in common with *Settlers*, though, as do Chess and Go.

The Final Verdict

"One of the finest, most sweetly designed and hugely entertaining games you'll ever get your grubby mitts on. Only a fool wouldn't buy a copy."

Steve Faragher

Score 10/10

Bubblegum Crisis : The Roleplaying Game

R Talsorian Games unveils the first *Fuzion* roleplaying game.

FYI: What is *Fuzion*?

The *Fuzion* rules system is the result of the partnership between R Talsorian and Hero Games. *Fuzion* has been designed as a generic set of rules that's easily adaptable to any setting, and is to be the standard system for future releases from both companies.

The system is aptly named, being a combination of R Talsorian's *Interlock* system (as used in *Cyberpunk 2020* and *Mekton Zeta)* and Hero Games' *Hero* system (as used in *Champions* and *Fantasy Hero*). Although they seem quite different on the surface, the combination works surprisingly well.

***Fuzion* has three levels of complexity – Primary Fuzion, Total Fuzion and Maximum Fuzion. *Bubblegum Crisis* uses the Total Fuzion level, which defines characters with a number of Primary and Derived Stats. Primary Stats are bought with points, while Derived Stats are calculated from them. In addition to Stats, characters are also rated by Campaign Options, which are broken down into Skills, Talents & Perks, and equipment, all of which are bought with another set of points. A character can gain more points by choosing one or more Complications.**

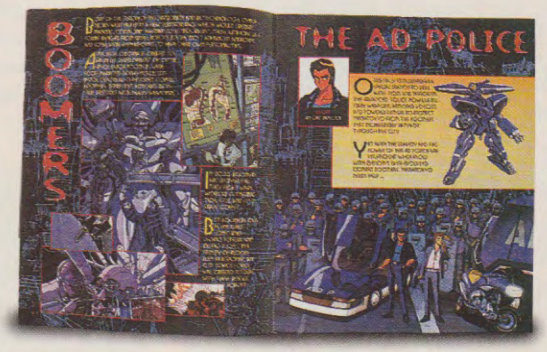
The game system itself is based around a task system – the character adds a Primary Stat and a Skill to a dice roll, and compares it to another character's total or the total of a difficulty and a dice roll. If the character's score is higher, they succeed.

***Fuzion* is a simple system that's easy to get to grips with and very flexible. By defining different points limits for character generation it's possible to easily adjust the 'power level' of the game you're playing, and the system has been designed so that you can add and remove Stats as necessary. The only slightly complex thing is the conversion of damage to the scale used for vehicles – a table would have helped a lot.**

One of the most successful series of animé videos ever released, *Bubblegum Crisis* comprises of eight episodes set in the futuristic MegaTokyo of 2033. An ultra-modern city built on the ruins of old Tokyo, itself destroyed in the Second Great Kanto Earthquake in 2055, MegaTokyo is dominated by the vast Genom Corporation, which controls 68% of the world's industry and 72% of its food.

Genom has become inextricably entwined with the future of mankind, not only through its vast holdings, but also due to its most profitable product, cybernetic androids know as Boomers. Originally developed to work in the harsh environment of space, Boomers have become a vital part of the world's economy, and are available in many different forms, from obviously artificial robots only capable of following pre-programmed instructions to highly advanced, semi-organic creations with full artificial intelligence.

Unfortunately, Genom is far from a benevolent entity. The aim of its founder, Quincy, seems to be little less than total world domination, and Genom will use any means available in pursuing this goal.

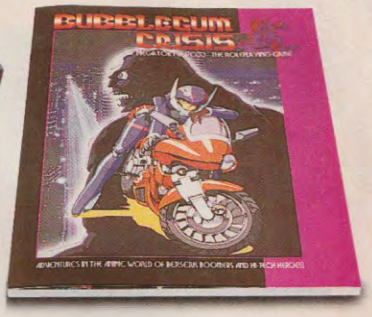


The handy episode guide acts as a painless intro to the high-tech world of *Bubblegum Crisis*.

Standing against this monolithic force is a group of four young women, dedicated to curbing Genom's excesses and protecting the public from its more nefarious schemes – the Knight Sabers. Lead by the daughter of Dr Stingray, the original creator of the first Boomers who was murdered by Genom in order to gain access to his research, the Knight Sabers use incredibly advanced suits of powered armour to fight against Genom and its deadly combat Boomers.

The *Bubblegum Crisis* videos and comics tell the story of the Knight Sabers, and have since been supplemented by the *AD Police* series, a prequel to the events of *Bubblegum Crisis*, and *Bubblegum Crash*,

Not even colour stills get across the amazing look of *Bubblegum Crisis* – you have to see the videos.



which continues the story. They're a somewhat unique mixture of genres, combining elements of cyberpunk and superhero comics with the high-octane pace and unique visual designs of Japanese animation. It's also packed with potential as a setting for an RPG.

Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game is R Talsorian's attempt to fulfil that potential, and also the first game to use the company's new *Fuzion* game system. At just under 180 pages, the book explores every aspect of the *Bubblegum Crisis* world, complete with notes on using each in the game, and also features a wealth of artwork in the form of artists' sketches and designs from the show never before published in English.

After a full-colour section containing an introduction to the basics of the world of 2033 and a full guide to the plots of the eight episodes of *Bubblegum Crisis,* the book is divided into three sections, split into subject-specific chapters. The first section begins with the obligatory introduction to roleplaying, and then moves straight into the specifics of the *Fuzion* system (see 'What is *Fuzion*?').

With the rule system out of the way, the bulk of the book is taken up with the second section, the 2033 Sourcebook. This starts with a general overview of the world as it stands and the history that led up to it. Following this are chapters covering big

business, 21st century technology, the Knight Sabers and their technology, Genom, Boomers, the law, the AD Police – an elite force specially trained to deal with rogue Boomers – and their equipment, various other important people and items, and finishes with an in-depth look at the Genom-dominated MegaTokyo. Game statistics for the various characters, equipment and technology are included in the relevant chapters.

The last section of the book returns to the game itself, and is aimed at referees. As well as a general discussion of the setting, this includes specific advice on creating plots and campaigns in the *Bubblegum Crisis* world, including an exhaustive list of possible plot elements, and some ideas for variants on the basic setting.

There's little doubt that the *Bubblegum Crisis* setting has a great deal to offer as the basis for a roleplaying game, and for the most part, *Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game* does a good job. The depth of research that's gone into it is obvious, and everything included here is 'official' background, making it even more impressive. Likewise, the *Fuzion* system is quick and easy to pick up, and the advice to referees is of the same high standard that's become one of R Talsorian's trademarks.

The only slightly curious thing is the way in which the book has been put together. Apparently R Talsorian has decided to include the relevant parts of the *Fuzion* system in each book that uses it, as here. While this means that you have everything you need in one place, one of the main points of *Fuzion* is the ease with which it enables you to mix and match between games.

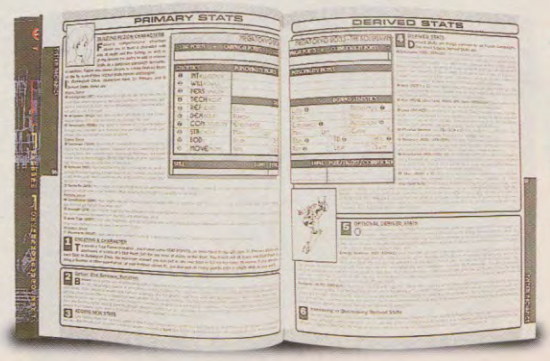
For example, while there aren't any detailed rules for cyberware or hacking in *Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game,* it would be fairly easy for anyone familiar with the *Cyberpunk* system to convert the relevant rules to *BGC,* and when *Cyberpunk 3rd Edition* (which will be '*Fuzion* Powered') is released, the relevant rules will be completely compatible – the book even suggests this option for interested refs.

However, if you buy more than one of the *Fuzion* games, you're going to end up with a lot of repeated rules information. You can't help but think that it might have been a better idea to produce the complete *Fuzion* rules as a separate book (including both the simpler Primary Fuzion and more detailed Maximum Fuzion complexity levels, which are missing here), and then release the various games and supplements separately. In the long run this would not only be more convenient, but it would give more space in each separate book, because you wouldn't have to repeat the rules in each.

The only real drawback to *BGC: The Roleplaying Game* as it stands, though, is the very nature of the source material. Much of the appeal of *Bubblegum Crisis* comes from its stunning visuals and the amazing designs of its technology. Unfortunately, roleplaying is a far less visual form than video, and even with a good referee it's going to be hard to replace this vital element. Likewise, the book concentrates very heavily on the established continuity of the show. Although there are plenty of ideas packed in here, unless your game revolves heavily around the Knight Sabers themselves, much of the material is going to be of little use other than as background flash.

There's no doubt that if you're a fan of *Bubblegum Crisis,* you'll love this – it's packed full of background info, lovely artwork and more. In that regard, *Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game* is an unmitigated success. For other gamers, though, there's still a lot of good stuff here, but it'll be a lot tougher to make effective use of it. Of course, whether or not this game is even intended to be played by people who haven't seen the videos is a debatable point.

"If you're a fan of *Bubblegum Crisis,* you'll love this – it's packed full of background info, lovely artwork and more."



VITAL INFO

title:	*Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game*
system:	a roleplaying game
price:	£13.99
publisher:	R Talsorian Games
	001 510 5491373
released:	out now
e-mail:	rtgl@best.com
web site:	http://www.best.com/~rtgl/

And the players said...

paul: "An interesting blend of different genres and a solid new rules system."

steve: "Some great ideas, but not having seen the show, I didn't really get a kick out of it."

em: "I loved the series, and the background info here is just what I wanted."

Also available...

There are several obvious alternatives to *Bubblegum Crisis: The Roleplaying Game,* most of them also produced by R Talsorian – *Cyberpunk 2020* and *Cybergeneration* both share many of *BGC's* cyberpunk elements, while *Mekton Zeta* concentrates on the Mecha side of things. And of course, *Champions* from Hero Games is still one of the best superhero RPGs around.

The Final Verdict

"For fans of *Bubblegum Crisis,* this is probably a dream come true, and you'll almost certainly love it. Those with less experience in Japanese animé may find it all a bit overwhelming and difficult to get across to their players, though. Still, there are lots of good ideas here, especially for *Cyberpunk* referees looking for something a little different, and the Fuzion rules system shows great promise for future releases."

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Aria: Roleplay

create the characters who control the fate of continents in the second volume of Last Unicorn Games' ambitious system.

At a time when most roleplaying designers have cottoned on to the idea that rules should be elegant simple and consistent, and that roleplaying rulebooks should be clear and (preferably) fun to read, *Aria: Roleplaying* lands on the scene with a very loud thud. Unfortunately, this massive rulebook consists of little more than a mega-complex character generation system, and some combat and magic rules. Simple and elegant it ain't.

Now, a character generation system of this complexity – 17 different attributes, to say nothing of skills, traits, expertise, and Odin knows what else – needs to be pretty lucidly explained if anyone is ever going to play the thing. But on the first page of the introduction to *Aria* you are told that, "the design framework... allows the nesting of one environment within the metes of another." The *metes* of another? This sets the tone for the next 499 or so pages. *Aria: Roleplaying* is a rulebook to be read dictionary in hand. If at all.

Which is a great shame, because it has at its centre one of the most original and interesting concepts to come along in a very long time. The idea is that an *Aria* campaign should tell the story of a whole fantasy world (rather than just a handful of characters in it). In most RPGs a session of play could be expected to represent a few hours, or at most a week of a character's life. In *Aria*, a session might represent years or decades even, conceivably, millennia. When two nations in the fantasy world are about to go to war, you generate some characters – the diplomats, or the generals who are going to decide the outcome of the conflict, or maybe just the grunts in the front line – and play out a scenario about them. The next session might take place 20 years later (when the soldiers are bitter old men) or even centuries later (when the war is the basis of myths and legends).

This doesn't mean you can't have any continuity in your PCs. The game suggests you might develop a family and follow its history over the generations. On the other hand, you might play an 'archetypal persona' – a hero who appears in various guises throughout the world's history – or even an immortal who can live through the whole show. Only the idea of developing families (perpetual genealogies, as the book insists on calling them) is explored at any length. There is a whole chapter about kinship, and a space on the character sheet to fill in such things as 'family orientation' (do you 'embrace', 'refuse', 'select', 'suppress' or 'consider' the 'motivations' of your family?).

I can see how an ambitious and committed gaming group might make this the basis of a truly wonderful campaign. I'm a lot less convinced by the notion of 'interactive history', in which players are expected to determine what happens in the gameworld themselves. The idea here is that a section of the game is played out in a

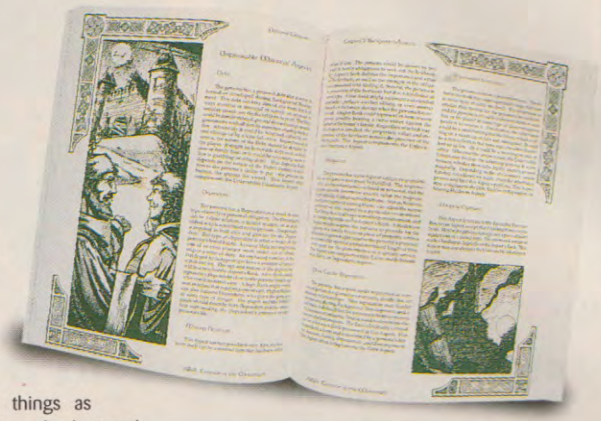
MYTHICAL CREDIBILITY

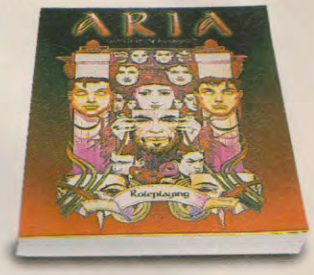
The subtitle of the game is taken from Joseph Campbell's book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which claims that the lives of most mythic heroes (Jesus Christ and Luke Skywalker, say) follow the same basic plot. Apart from the title, it's hard to find much evidence of this 'monomyth' in the game.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The authors would like us to call campaigns 'Canticles', and really big campaigns 'Arias'. They also think refs are 'mythguides'. This, they say, gives the game "a sense of tightness and individuality". They add that veteran gamers are free to ignore this, which is exactly what we've done.

ying





series of turns (intervals) representing about five years each. In each turn societies perform internal and external actions. An internal action might be a civil war, an external action might be a blockade of a rival power. The results of these actions effect the status of the societies. You might think that this is a sort of semi-abstract wargame, but in fact the authors recommend that the societies involved actually be roleplayed by the players, and that the various 'parameters' of the society should be treated as personality traits of a character. How, pray tell, do you roleplay a country? ('Well, Soviet Union, what do you do now?' 'I check carefully for secret doors, and then split up into several smaller republics'.) There are very few clues in the book. I would rather have heard much more information about this intriguing idea, along with an example of play, rather than have to wade through pages and pages of examples of internal and external actions.

Good ideas apart, what does this book contain? It's split into two halves, the Persona Creation Book and the Myth Creation Book. (They are paginated separately, as if the writers were intending to publish two different books and then changed their minds at the last minute.)

The first half deals with character generation. This is essentially a points based system – you get interaction points based on your age and the power level of the campaign, and use them to buy such things as attributes, expertise, background aspects and personality traits. Your choices in these areas can be affected by your 'heritage template' which the ref is supposed to have worked out, based on the narrative environment (ie. place) that you come from.

The writers are obsessed with codifying everything in game terms, so that the whole thing rapidly turns into an indistinguishable soup. One of the things that your 'heritage template' is supposed to tell you is your character's appearance (most Vikings are big guys with red hair). But did we really need 250 brain-numbing words distinguishing between Fair and Very Fair complexion, and pointing out that in a given society 'curly and wavy hair' is uncommon? Detail is one thing, but when this sort of detail is applied to physical attributes, family, career and heritage I begin to wonder if someone is taking the piss. And it's all rather soulless – we are supposed to be more interested in what Family Elements can be purchased by a character with the Family Attribute of Orphan, rather than how this traumatic childhood might effect the way we roleplay him.

The myth creation section is rather more of a hodgepodge, covering task resolution and combat in some depth, explaining how to create a system of magic for your world and telling you how to define the heritage templates mentioned above.

There is certainly a lot of detail here, and some gamers might find a book which contains lists of weapons, character types, skills and so on a useful source of data in designing their own games. But an RPG is, in the final analysis, intended to be played. My overall score reflects this: *Aria* is quite literally unplayable.

"*Aria: Roleplaying* lands on the scene with a very loud thud... It is quite literally unplayable."

VITAL INFO

title:	*Aria: Roleplaying*
system:	Characters, combat, magic and skills for *Aria: Canticle of the Monomyth*
price:	£19.95
publisher:	Last Unicorn Games
	001 717 730 9693
released:	out now
e-mail:	monomyth@aol.com

Also available...

To be honest, there are only a very few fantasy roleplaying games that aren't better than *Aria*. You could try reliable old *AD&D* from TSR, *Earthdawn* from FASA, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* from Hogshead, or *The Palladium Fantasy RPG* (from Palladium, natch).

Even more *Aria*

If you can stand the excitement, there are more volumes of *Aria* to come... Already published is *Aria: Worlds*. Remarkably, this system for creating worlds is shorter and simpler than the character-creation supplement. It suffers from the same problem of over-writing as the roleplaying book, but it also contains more solid examples and a fair amount of information not easily obtainable elsewhere – the brief history of technology in the appendix, for example, would be a useful resource for most world-builders. If you are at all interested in the idea of interactive history, then *Aria: Worlds* should be your first purchase.

In the next year, we should also have seen:

***Aria: Menagerie* – rules for creating realistic and fantastic animals.**

***Aria: Terraforming* – guidelines for creating the geography and physical layout of your worlds.**

***Aria: Reality* - more on the creation of magic and religion for fantasy universes.**

***Aria: Interactive History Companion* – a lot more details about how to go about roleplaying an entire society.**

Plus various referees' screens, character archive packs and a pre-generated world setting.

The Final Verdict

"Verbose, obtuse, badly explained, badly organised, repetitive, over-complex, pretentious, but containing one phenomenally good idea. *Aria* should have been a milestone in the history of roleplaying games. Unfortunately, it has turned out to be a large and expensive doorstop instead."

Andrew Rilstone

Score 1/10

Inferno: Battles of the Abyss

Welcome to Hell. If Dante was a wargamer, this would be his Friday night recreation.

Hands up who reads the classics. Anyone? If the answer is yes, (any pseuds out there, please quit your derisive snorting), you might recall a classical poem written by an Italian chap some centuries ago – Dante's *Inferno*. Dante wrote of how he descended the nine Circles of Hell with Virgil the poet as guide, looking for his lost love Beatrice.

As can be expected, the Netherworld isn't a pleasant place, being the realm of the damned and all, but the brave lads at Canada's Global Games have followed in Dante's footsteps to create a gameworld set in Hell. While the Global crew has planned a multi-release programme of wargame, roleplay and miniatures material over the coming months, the first item off the blocks is *Inferno*, a boxed set of tabletop rules for monster-to-monster warfare, pitting 60-foot tall demons against each other in the wars between the lords of the dead.

So what kind of bang do you get for your buck? The game materials are nearly all of a very high grade, with several sheets of lurid, thick-gauge counters, all die cut and ready to punch out. These vary from magic effect indicators and blast templates (some of the largest I've seen) to the various demon forces used in the game. The latter come with their own plastic stand-up clips, and reproduce some of the game's excellent figure artwork on one side, and conveniently, the unit's stats on the other. The only gripe is that the mid-sized counters have their numbers obscured by the clips, defeating the object somewhat. There's a pair of cool black six-sided dice with blood-red pips included, too, but the components fall down with the two flimsy map sheets, which despite being described as 'boards' are printed on glossy paper stock that won't stand up well to repeated foldings and unfoldings. The A3-size maps are also both the same, although the box does provide ample extra terrain counters to customise them with – pools, tar pits, forest, rubble and Hellish flora such as the Woods of Suicides, Strangler Vines and Malice Pods.

Accompanying the components are the basic rules and The Tome, a background book. *Inferno's* rules mechanics only actually cover 11 pages, and while they grow smoother with each playing, on the initial reading they're a bit of a let-down, something which isn't helped by poor writing that really could have done with an editor's touch. As mentioned above, *Inferno* is a D6-based system and combat involves rolling whole bunches of 'em to score hits (and only sixes count), and then a whole bunch more to do damage. Attacks go under the fun name of 'offensive acts', a term which brought much 'fnarr fnarring' to the more lavatorially humoured among us.

As well as the usual hitting each other with things, *Inferno* has a whole

The Styx Marines

42

43

HELLISH FIGURES

As well as *Inferno* itself, Global Games is also producing an ever-growing range of miniatures for the game. Imagine these guys beautifully sculpted as three or four-inch tall lead figures, and you'll have some idea of just how great they look.

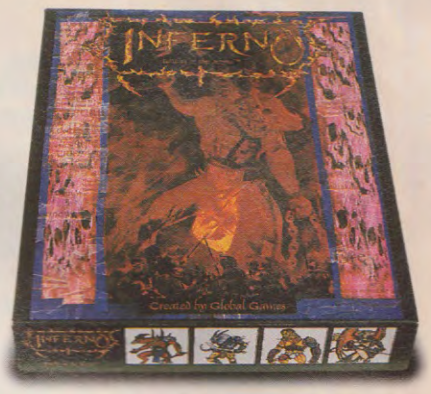
INFERNAL ROLES

Global Games is already planning a roleplaying game based on the same background as *Inferno*, and tentatively scheduled for release next Summer. Watch out for more news in future issues of arcane.

Eternal Damn Nations

They say that war is Hell. According to *Inferno*, Hell is war. Throughout the nine circles of the underworld, the various demonic kings and queens rule their kingdoms of damned subjects and jockey for position and power, while the Horned One himself sleeps soundly at the bottom of the Abyss. Each of the seven rulers fittingly punishes those mortals who have sinned in different fashions, and sometimes these lost souls volunteer for fighting duty in the inter-circle conflicts in the hopes of gaining favour.

The wars are fought in the Hollows, foul and evil places in between the circles, and the demon lords gather souls for sacrifice to the Archfiends, summoning the titanic monsters to do battle for them in return. The intrigues of the rulers are played against the backdrop of the sleeping Devil and the long-anticipated return to Heaven, which the demon lords wait for in order to exact their revenge on those who cast them out. The Archfiends themselves are powerful creatures, dragged up from the depths to wage war, all of them former angels who took the long drop to Hell with Lucifer, becoming warped members of the Fallen. *Inferno's* worldbook, The Tome of The Abyss, features full-page illustrations of the 12 Archfiends found in the game, each of them highly-toothed and covered with spikes/tentacles/claws/slime/all of the above. All of the smaller lieutenants also get a brief overview and history, such as the neat looking Pluton Hussars or the toothy Styx Martyrs – as well as a passable read, the tome provides a fair few scenario ideas for a wily referee to use to fill the gap in the rulebook.



"Surely it's better to adhere to Dante's terrifying vision of the dark place than to make it a pale *Doom* clone."

(demonic) host of magical powers to inflict and deflect with. My faves are 'The Truth' as in 'is out there', the 'Picks of Pleasure' and the 'Lightning Tongue'. There's also scope for critical hits (which cause secondary injuries such as lost limbs or 'brain farts'), and round by round wound regeneration, which can be assisted by eating any nearby hordes of the undead.

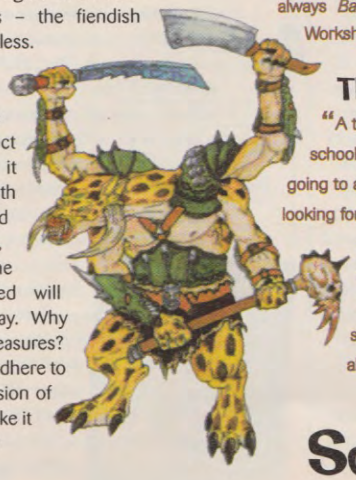
There are some omissions in the rules that do spoil things – the rules for creating your own demonic creatures, or 'Archfiends', are imprecise and give no guidelines or examples. The design system uses a 'soul cost' as its building points, but there're no battle scenarios or notes on typical points levels for players to work from, or indeed, how to gather 'souls' in an extended campaign. The game also lacks reprints of the critical hit tables and firing arcs, which would have eliminated page flipping.

Beyond the rules, the rest of the booklet is filled out with demon stats, 12 Archfiends, seven kinds of 'Lieutenant', some undead 'Sergeants' and three kinds of damned hordes who strangely all have the same stats. The other book, the Tome of the Abyss, is a 64-page background resource, modelled after Dante's original epic poem. It takes the form of a journal, like Virgil guiding the reader down through the Circles of Hell and introducing the inhabitants. The Tome is the best thing in the box and in a wise move Global has made it available separately. Every other page has a great illustration, which, while not perhaps as disturbing as they should be, are nonetheless excellent and help capture the mood of the game. Notes about the various demonic rulers of each circle are provided with hints at ideas for battles and scenarios, and each of the Archfiends and lesser monsters are profiled. If Global's planned *Inferno* RPG is as good-looking as this, it may be on to a winner next Summer.

But I must have a serious gripe about the background. Nowhere in any of *Inferno's* contents can you find the words 'Hell', 'Demon' or 'Devil', which is a tad strange considering that we are playing war in Old Nick's backyard, after all.

Obviously mindful of the moral majority crusaders who view all gaming as the tool of Satan, the Global Games team has apparently tried to tone down the hellishness of Hell (even down to writing, "This is a game" in the rulebook) and has consequently lost a fair bit of the point. We're talking about the realm of the dead here – everlasting pain and suffering, rivers of fire and sulphur, never-ending Chris DeBurgh recitals, the whole thing. Pulling its pointy teeth just turns it into a nastier than usual fantasy background and misses out on some great opportunities. Imagine a war in Hell with Hitler, Genghis Khan and Custer as generals – the fiendish possibilities are limitless.

Global Games is going to come under fire for this product anyway, and if it follows through with its planned RPG and rules supplements, you can bet the religiously offended will chase it all the way. Why then, have half measures? Surely it's better to adhere to Dante's terrifying vision of the place than to make it a pale *Doom* clone?



VITAL INFO

title:	*Inferno: Battles of the Abyss*
system:	tabletop/miniatures fantasy wargame
price:	£24.95
publisher:	Global Games
	001 416 763 6892
released:	out now
e-mail:	losglobl@hookup.net
web site:	http://www.hookup.net/_losglobl/

And the players said...

pete: "This game tries so hard not to offend anyone, it loses much of its power."

marc: "Doesn't read too well, but you soon get the hang of things when you're giving it some fire and brimstone."

john: "Two words: demonology lite."

Also available...

Archfiend miniatures will soon be arriving to complement *Inferno,* and sourcebooks based around the seven rulers of the Underworld will come later – summer '97 should see the launch of the *Inferno* roleplaying game. On the other hand, there's always *BattleTech, Heavy Gear* or Games Workshop's line of *Warhammer* games.

The Final Verdict

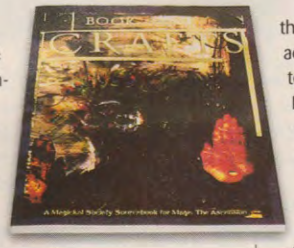
"A transplanting of the *BattleTech* school of wargames into Hell, this is going to appeal to fantasy tabletop gamers looking for something different. While the rules are a bit flat and lacklustre, the stunning graphics come a long way towards forgiving its sins. Try before you buy if at all possible."

Jim Swallow

Score 6/10

The Book of Crafts

eight new magickal societies and not a basket-weaver among them.



You could easily make a comparison between the character types in the oh-so-modern Storyteller System games and character classes in *Dungeons and Dragons*, if you wished. The *Vampire* Clans, the *Werewolf* Tribes and *Mage* Traditions all define the style of characters in a similar way.

To push the parallel, *The Book of Crafts* is a collection of new character classes for *Mage*. However, the group a mage belongs to doesn't just define what he is, it defines who he is. At the heart of every use of True Magick is a deep belief in the ideas that underlie it. Each Craft is a society of Mages that follow a particular belief system that excludes them from the established four sides in the game's Ascension War: the Traditions, Technocracy, Marauders and Nephandi.

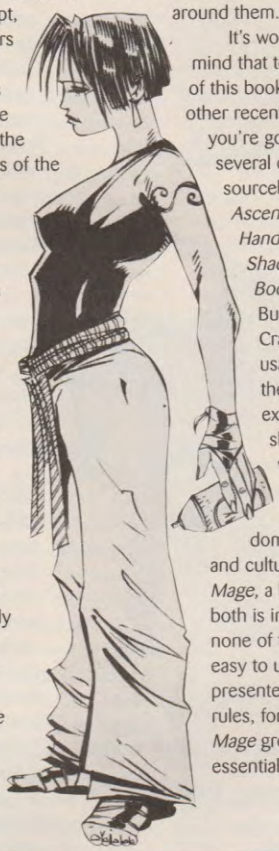
The history, culture, beliefs, organisation and Magickal style of the Crafts is given in some detail across the 15 or so pages devoted to each, along with common Foci, Rotes and allies. Eight Crafts are detailed: the warring Wu-Keng and Wu Lung of China, the fanatical, crocodile-worshipping Hem-Ka Sobk of Egypt, the Amazonian Sisters of Hippolyta, the fallen Tradition once known as the Solificati and now the Children of Knowledge, the Christian fundamentalists of the Templars, the Hawaiian Kopa Loei and the Voodoo-esque Bata'a.

VITAL INFO

A sourcebook for *Mage: The Ascension*
£11.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now
http://www.white-wolf.com

Virtually all have a role at the fringes of the Ascension War. Some, like the Templars and Children of Knowledge were once part of it. Some, like the Kopa Loei, have been victims of it and one in particular, the Bata'a is as powerful as most of the Traditions.

All of the cultures are thoughtfully, deeply and, most of all, readably covered. The style of presentation allows the book a multitude of potential uses in a *Mage* game. In established Chronicles, the Crafts are useful sources of plots, characters and events which will broaden the scope of the game considerably. Any of the them could, with a little care, provide new player characters. An ambitious Storyteller could even construct an entire chronicle around them.



It's worth bearing in mind that to make the most of this book, as with many other recent *Mage* releases, you're going to need several other sourcebooks, notably *Ascension's Right Hand*, *The Book of Shadows* and *The Book of Madness*. But several of the Crafts are easily usable without them, and any experienced referee should be able to wing it for the others.

In a game as dominated by idea and cultural belief as *Mage*, a book this rich in both is invaluable. While none of the Crafts are as easy to use as those presented in the main rules, for an experienced *Mage* group this is a pretty essential purchase.

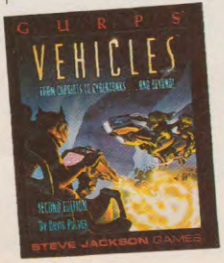
Adam Tinworth
Score 8/10

GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition

Like the original book, *GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition* offers a complete vehicle design system for players and referees of Steve Jackson's generic roleplaying game. The entire book has been re-written, revised and updated, and features many more options and accessories. It contains expanded rules for spacecraft and locomotives, and a comprehensive weapons design system.

Best of all, though, the actual design process has been simplified, making it easier to use without sacrificing detail, and the designs are fully compatible with *GURPS Robots*. This last point is not particularly surprising, considering that this book has been written by the same author, David L Pulver.

GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition
A sourcebook for *GURPS*
£13.50
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 7866
Out now



The design process itself is pleasantly logical. You first decide on a basic concept for your vehicle, along with its tech level. The vehicle is then designed by choosing its main sub-assemblies and body features in turn, and then choosing the components. Next you calculate the volume of the body and each sub-assembly, which in turn is used to calculate the size, cost and weight of the vehicle's structure. Finally you can layer armour on to the vehicle, and then calculate its stats.

GURPS Vehicles is admirably flexible and enables you to design pretty much anything you like, as ably demonstrated by the example that runs through the book – a combination car, watercraft, submersible and flying machine! However, you can't help but wonder just how often this book's going to be useful. Certainly, if you're running a vehicle-heavy campaign, and want some degree of consistency in the designs, or intend to allow your players to build custom vehicles, then *GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition* will be very handy indeed. For most campaigns, though, I can't imagine it's going to be required reading. Still, it certainly achieves what it sets out to do well.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Magic: The Gathering Introductory Two-Player Set

Magic: The Gathering is the most widely played and generally popular collectable card game in the world. There are hundreds of thousands of players across the globe, but, of course there could always be more. To increase the number of people giving *Magic* a go, Wizards of the Coast has now released a 'quick-start' set of two pre-constructed decks, designed to enable two players to learn the basic rules of the game in, well, no more than an hour or so, starting from scratch.

Magic: The Gathering Introductory Two-Player Set
A quick-start version of *Magic*
£9.99
Wizards of the Coast
0345 125599
Out now

This pack makes learning the game of *Magic* far, far easier than by using the standard rulebook because, rather than simply stating the rules, it leads you through, card by card, your first two games. Each of the two players has his or her own 'rulebook' which is little more than a series of instructions with descriptions of what's being done as each card is played, and a deck which has been constructed in a specific order of cards (therefore, when you play your first game the rulebook 'knows' what card's going to be drawn next). Done this way, *Magic* is supremely easy to learn (I gave the pack to a couple of people at Future Publishing who'd never played *Magic* before, and asked them to see if they could make any sense of it – and they did).

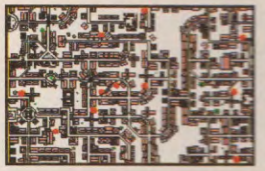
For people who've not played *Magic* before, and haven't got a mate who plays and who can teach them, this is a perfect method of learning the game with the minimum of fuss. The decks are good (and fun), the rulebooks are so simple a chimp could follow them, and it makes learning the game fast.

Paul Pettengale Score 8/10

Campaign Cartographer Pro

Campaign Cartographer (**arcane** 1, 8/10) is a fully-functional Computer-Aided Design (CAD) program, specifically written to help design maps for roleplaying games. *Campaign Cartographer Pro*, the fifth expansion for the

Campaign Cartographer Pro
An expansion disk for *Campaign Cartographer*
£29.95
ProFantasy Software
0181 675 1155
Out now



program, expands and updates the basic *Campaign Cartographer* with a whole range of useful new commands and controls.

The most noticeable of these is the new icon bar, which enables you to move around your drawings, zoom in and out, control windows and select layers, fill styles, line styles and snap, even in mid-command. If you're already using *Campaign Cartographer* to draw maps for your games, this alone is almost enough to justify the asking price of the new version, because it dramatically speeds up the whole process.

In addition, however, there are many other new features. You can drag, scale and rotate symbols on-screen, enabling you to see what things will look like instantly. A new SKETCH command allows freehand drawing for the aspiring artists among you, and a rather nifty fractal generator allows you to turn a rough outline into a fully-detailed coastline or river with a simple command. You can easily fill areas with scalable patterns, open up to eight windows at once, record and play macros for frequently used commands – the list of features just goes on. Finally, there's a random generator program which can create huge cities or dungeons at a frightening speed, ready for you to edit or, in emergency, use immediately.

In short, then, *Campaign Cartographer Pro* makes an already powerful program not only more flexible, but more importantly a whole lot easier to use. It's still not instantly accessible, but it is a lot quicker. Even if you only rarely use *Campaign Cartographer*, this comes highly recommended.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

Kithbook: Trolls
A sourcebook for *Changeling: The Dreaming*
£6.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

Kithbook: Trolls

Kithbook: Trolls is a slim, 72-page sourcebook, written in the evocative style of most *Changeling: The Dreaming* supplements. Along with eye-moistening fairy tales about honour, valour and unrequited love, it contains plenty of new information about Trollish history, their varying attitudes, outlooks and position in fae society, as well as new flaws and merits, treasures and weapons, character templates and a blank Troll character sheet.

Trolls are tough fighters who follow a strict code of honour and duty, but this kithbook shows how they can be torn between their oaths and their secret, passionate nature. It also outlines several different traditional standpoints Trolls can take amidst the Machiavellian politics of the fae, showing how Trolls needn't just be played as brainless bodyguards at the beck and call of the Sidhe. This gives greater depth and versatility to a race of kith that, superficially, might seem a little boring. Although the supplement doesn't contain any actual scenarios or plot outlines, there is enough material here to easily inspire ideas for encounters or, indeed, whole chronicles in which imaginative Storytellers can pile the angst on any trolls in their game.

The artwork, as usual, is of a high standard with full colour illustrations and bright borders. On some pages, however, the type has been reduced to an unpleasantly small size in order to cram in as much information as possible. Nevertheless, having too much information is better than having a minuscule amount blown up to the type size of a five year-old's story book – one of White Wolf's common problems.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 7/10

Horror's Heart

A sickening, pulsing evil waits at the centre of this campaign. Can you guess what it is?

It's just as well I paid attention to the first person who ever told me that you can't judge a book by its cover. For, if I hadn't, I would never have bothered opening *Horror's Heart*. And it's a real shame that this mini-campaign sports such a tacky cover, because when you open it up you find a shiny little gem waiting inside.

The byword of this campaign is subtlety, because the elegance of thought that has gone into its design leads the players deeper and deeper into an intricate web of competition, paranoia, deceit and deadly evil – in other words, everything you could ever want from a game of *Call of Cthulhu*.

The investigators (who probably ought to stop reading this review about now) are invited by an old friend to Montreal, where a mystery awaits. Before they can even get there the adventure begins, and before they know it they've been sucked into a storyline which includes bootlegging gangsters, two ancient and evil sects who are at each other's throats, a family of shapechangers (all very *X-Files*) and the return of a Great Old One. As you would expect with a line-up like that, this can be a fairly nasty, brutish and short adventure for your investigators unless they're careful, clever and resourceful.

The adventure is presented as six, day-long segments, which are ideal for six sessions. However, the actual timing of the events presented is not as important as that may make them sound; providing that everything happens in the order the book suggests, the campaign can easily be spread over more time. The other admirable flexibility of this campaign is that it could, as the authors Sheldon Gillett and Lynn Willis suggest, be fairly easily transferred to the 1890s or the 1990s.

VITAL INFO
A 1920s mini-campaign for *Call of Cthulhu*
£8.95
Chaosium
001 510 547 7681
Out now
chaosium@aol.com
http://www.sirius.com/~chaosium/chaosium.html

The only slight problem I could detect with this excellent campaign is that the writing style is a little complex which, according to recent studies carried out, means that the authors will probably be clear of Alzheimer's in later life, but can make the campaign a bit difficult to get a clear grip on, especially in the early stages. However, the effort required to read it through a couple of times will be amply rewarded by a sophisticated campaign that will intrigue, infuriate and delight your players. An added bonus is that, with all the action taking place in one city, the amount of background research required on the referee's behalf is considerably less than usual.

Horror's Heart is a fine example of why *Call of Cthulhu* remains one of the most popular roleplaying games ever created. It is difficult to imagine another genre that could lend itself so well to this sort of complex and satisfying entertainment.

Steve Faragher Score 9/10

Psionic Artifacts of Athas

Among other releases, the *Prism Pentad* series of novels irrecoverably changed the *Dark Sun* setting and resulted in a revised, second edition of the system, and a series of expansion supplements which seek to bring the referee back up to speed with exactly what is happening on Athas.

Psionic Artifacts of Athas
A sourcebook for *AD&D Dark Sun*
£11.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Psionic Artifacts of Athas details the artefacts used within the novels and consequently introduces a plethora of new items and rediscovered ancient relics. A minor drawback of the supplement is that the majority of the artefacts detailed here are simply far too powerful to be given to players – The Dark Lense used by Rajaat to imbue the sorcerer-kings with their horrific powers being a prime example – but they do offer excellent focuses for campaigns. Tips on how to fit them into an adventure follow these major items.

The most exciting objects found within the volume, however, are the life-shaped items. Created during the Blue age of Athas, when much of the world was covered by oceans, these items are living entities – boots, gloves and weapons that meld with the skin, and creatures that can, for example, shed perfectly-shaped arrow-head scales while others bond with players to form hidden weapons or imbue special abilities. These are but a handful of those available, and

The Legends of the Hero-Kings

You don't want to roll that dice — you want to go out, you do!

Random events in *Birthright* represent the reality of ruling a domain – from annoying attendances at weddings to deadly assassination attempts. After an epic campaign though, these events are most easily resolved through a little thought and a roll of a D6 rather than outright adventuring. When you have escaped death umpteen times while stealing a magical artefact from some bug-eyed beastie, the drive to ride off and sort out the reason for a poor harvest is pretty low to say the least, and so it is far easier to hand the matter over to a trusted non-player character.

But what if that character suddenly turns traitor on you? What if the poor harvest was the herald of something far nastier?

The Legends of the Hero-Kings provides a variety of adventure ideas stemming from each random event possible within the *Birthright* rulebook, and plots range from discrediting a player regent to the awakening of an ancient evil – each forcing the characters to step in themselves rather than leave the situation in somebody else's hands. All are tailored to a particular strength of adventurer, but can be easily adapted.

VITAL INFO

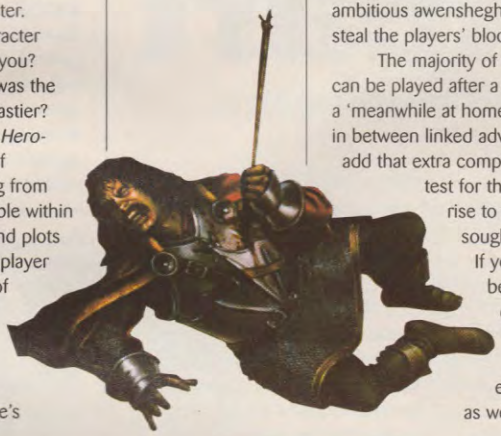
A supplement for *AD&D Birthright*

£11.99

TSR

01223 212517

Out now



As with all campaign-aiding supplements this volume takes the pressure away from refs by supplying easily implemented scenario templates – and for the most part they are of a good quality with each adding a degree of excitement and a twist of plot into the headaches of rulership. Petty court squabbles can result in a courtier civil war if not handled carefully, forgotten heirs return to haunt a player regent and ambitious awenshegh scheme to steal the players' bloodlines.

The majority of these plots can be played after a campaign as a 'meanwhile at home' scenario, or in between linked adventures to add that extra complication or test for the players to rise to the next sought after level. If you're in between campaigns there are a couple of epics available as well.

As an adventuring aid *Legends* is hardly a required read – but it is an extremely useful one and does display some interesting ideas, not the least of which is an appendix directed at those regents who have become near all-conquering in Cerilia and simply dispatch private armies to sort out any kind of unrest in lieu of attending themselves.

Unfortunately, the presentation is rather disappointing with an extremely varied quality of artwork, however the general layout is easily followed and methodical. It's by no means an essential release, but *The Legends of the Hero-Kings* is useful and at times inspiring for future adventures.

David Cornford Score 7/10

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each of these intriguing and unusual artefacts has full statistics and ability details. There are also 49 charts so that relics can be modified or redesigned to snugly fit into an existing adventure.

Four major items from *The Book of Artifacts* are not detailed however, and this unfortunately lends an air of incompleteness to the supplement which otherwise would have been a comprehensive guide to the psionic and magical items to be found on the world. Nevertheless this sourcebook is a must for referees.

David Cornford Score 8/10

Campaign Cartographer Perspectives

Yet another new expansion for the *Campaign Cartographer* program, *CC-Perspectives* is a rather cunning program which takes two-dimensional plan drawings from *Campaign Cartographer* and 'extrudes' them to create isometric three-dimensional views of your maps. It even automatically deletes hidden lines.

Campaign Cartographer Perspectives

An expansion disk for *Campaign Cartographer*

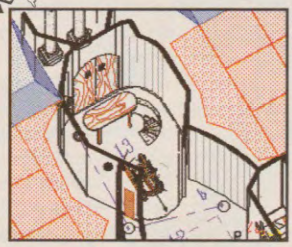
£24.95

ProFantasy Software

0191 675 1155

Out now

A range of new tools and options enable you to alter the extruded map, changing the heights of walls, adding new 3D symbols to replace the old 2D ones, mapping textures on to surfaces and so on. Once you get the hang of the program, you can easily create sloped walls and floors, platforms and ledges, even contoured terrain, fleshing out your maps considerably.



It's a remarkably simple process, considering the impressive looking maps which are produced. Not only do they look good, but they're often easier to understand and follow than flat plan drawings, especially when you're faced with the perennial problem of trying to describe rooms and structures to a group of players.

On the downside, it really helps if you know what you're doing with the basic *Campaign Cartographer* program, and are familiar with the way the commands work. Trying to muddle through this if you haven't had *Campaign Cartographer* for long can be trying, to say the least.

There also comes a point when you begin to think that ProFantasy should just release a new version of *Campaign Cartographer*, with the features of the expansions built in. At the moment, if you bought the basic program and all the add-ons, you'd be looking at spending over £150. Still, yet another neat little addition to the program.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Monsters & Animals 2nd Edition

Every fantasy RPG has a bestiary, and they all contain similar mixtures of traditional creatures of fantasy and legend plus a few original ones. The difference between a good bestiary and a bad one is the variety of monsters, the quality of the descriptions and the artwork.

Monsters & Animals certainly rates above-average. It has pleasing artwork and most entries include both an illustration and a map showing habitation. It does a good job of defining how traditional fantasy and mythical creatures fit into the *Palladium Fantasy RPG* world in terms of ecology and outlook. Many of the more fabulous monsters have been given interesting twists that explain their origins and inspire scenario ideas. Several pages are put aside to specific creature types, such as supernatural entities and faeries. However, there are no dragons detailed here because these are detailed in *Dragons & Gods*.

Monsters & Animals 2nd Edition

A sourcebook for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG*

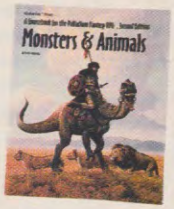
£9.95

Palladium Books Inc

001 313 946 2900

Out now

Most of the original creatures and humanoid races are interesting and novel – such as the grotesque, subterranean Maxpary – but a few of them are simply monsters with the head of one animal, body of a second and tail of a third.



The section on mundane animals is pretty comprehensive and reasonably well-researched, combining facts with details of how animals fit into the gameworld environment. Nevertheless, the otherwise laudable entry on koala bears fails to mention the strange-but-true fact that their urine contains cyanide. You can't have everything, I suppose.

Second edition *Monsters & Animals* is larger than the original version, has more optional player character races and is compatible with the entire *Palladium* Megaverse. Excellent value at under £10.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 7/10

Player's Secrets of Khourane

The *Player's Secrets* series is a mixed bunch – thankfully, though, this latest release is one of the better volumes. Set in the land of the cultured Khinasi, *Khourane* represents an exotic and exciting domain for a player regent with dense jungles inhabited by xenophobic elves and mysterious legends, bordered as ever by malevolent awnshegh.

The true strength of *Khourane,* however, is in its exoticism. After a series of campaigns set virtually in the same surroundings, players and referees alike begin to feel the need for a change, and I for one usually slip in an adventure or two from another games system to break up the monotony of it all. *Birthright* gets around this problem by opening up a number of differing lands to adventurers.

Khourane has a distinctly Arabian flavour exhibiting a refreshingly different culture, and in addition the populace has a humane outlook on life – together these factors make an excellent change of flavour during a campaign or series of adventures. The domain has plenty of potential for all manner of internal adventures, and additional aspects such as a mysteriously sealed dwarven city can be woven into an existing campaign.

As with all of the *Player's Secrets* series, the cover doubles for a series of handy, well-drawn maps of the domain and layouts of the Emira's palace. The supplement itself is also very well structured and thankfully easy to read.

It is a pity that the profiles of the bordering awnshegh aren't presented because they exert a considerable influence over the domain, but for £4.99 *The Player's Secrets of Khourane* is nevertheless well worth a look.

David Comford Score 8/10

The Player's Secrets of Khourane
A supplement for *AD&D Birthright*
£4.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Requiem: Grim Harvest

when Hell is full the dead will walk the Earth.

This rather functional, if wonderfully horrific, philosophy is behind the George Romero *Zombie* trilogy. *Requiem: Grim Harvest* enables *Ravenlofters* to experience a world in which something spookily similar is occurring. And it's not very nice. Good fun, certainly, but not very nice.

This three-book boxed set – *Death Triumphant, Necropolis* and *Requiem* – is an odd mix. *Death Triumphant* is the conclusion of the *Grim Harvest* campaign which pitches the players into battle against Azalin, the Lich lord of Darkon. *Necropolis* is a geographical guide to the land where *Death Triumphant* is set, so that after the adventure has run its (un)natural course the party can continue to romp around this most gothic of countries. The final tome, *Requiem,* is a truly queer fish which extrapolates from the party's position at the end of the campaign to create its own sub-game system – and it is breathtakingly different.

As the final installment of the trilogy, *Death Triumphant* really delivers. Picking up the pace from the slightly more sedate second episode, the players are instantly thrown into conflict with the most powerful denizens of *Ravenloft* as they race against the clock to avert an apocalypse. With a heart-stopping (quite literally) mid-section and an exciting closing chase, this adventure is a frantic and fitting climax to a truly excellent series.

Necropolis is a good guide, crammed with fine and highly transportable adventure seeds. So even if you never run another Darkon adventure, you'll be able to plunder a few fine ideas and characters for other *Ravenloft* campaigns. The best of these being the absolutely ghastly Maggot Golem, which is pure Clive Barker and should definitely be used to turn players' stomachs the length and breadth of the land immediately.

VITAL INFO
Sourcebooks and game adventure for *Ravenloft AD&D* campaigns
£18.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Requiem, however, presents many problems – not the least of which is that the sub-system evolves out of *Death Triumphant's* climax, and so by describing its basis the adventure's shocking twist would be ruined. Essentially, *Requiem* inverts one of the basic tenets of *AD&D* game mechanics with dramatic effects. The resultant system is elegant and well executed, although it does feel a little clinical and contrived at times. It would make an ideal holiday game when you're looking for a quick hit adventure with some temporary characters, but otherwise this fine design exercise doesn't really have the legs for long-term play.

The introduction of a boxed set at the endgame of a trilogy seems a little mercenary, especially when the first two episodes are so good that both players and referees will be desperate to see the campaign through to the end. But this climactic adventure is well worth the expense on its own. With the added benefit of some excellent adventure ideas in *Necropolis* and the curious *Requiem* system, you'd be mad not to inflict this most horrifying of sets on your players.

Trenton Webb Score 7/10

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

The latest sourcebook for The World of Indiana Jones setting for the *MasterBook, Temple of Doom* takes an in-depth look at the locations, characters and groups that featured in the second of the ever-popular Indy films.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom
A sourcebook for *MasterBook*
£9.95
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

Now, as any *Indiana Jones* fan knows, *Temple of Doom* was the let-down of the series. Luckily, though, this had little to do with the locations in the film, which had a great deal of potential. As such, there's quite a lot of useful stuff included here. The first four chapters of the book deal with separate areas, beginning with Shanghai (a perfect city for any Indy game), then moving on to Mayapore Village (which includes a discussion of the Gods of India), Pankot Province and finally the Temple of Doom itself. Chapter five, 'Legendary, Mystical and Dangerous Domains of India', takes a broader look at suitable settings for other adventures in India. The book then closes with not one but two complete adventures, *The Search for Nurhachi* and *Day of the Dark Light,* both of which contain some good ideas and are fairly playable as they are, with a minimum amount of work needed from the referee.

The *Indiana Jones MasterBook* supplement may not have been particularly inspiring, but this is a good, solid sourcebook for it, featuring a lot of handy information and a couple of decent adventures. Good stuff.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

A World of Darkness Second Edition

This title is misleading because it suggests a reprint or a revision to the rules, when in fact so much of the material is new or updated that it's effectively a brand new book.

A World of Darkness Second Edition
A sourcebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade*
£11.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

Owners of the first *World of Darkness* supplement will find no sign of Jordan, the Gaki, Haiti, Hunedora Castle or The Vampire Club. The British Isles and Europe By Night are largely intact but are revised

The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

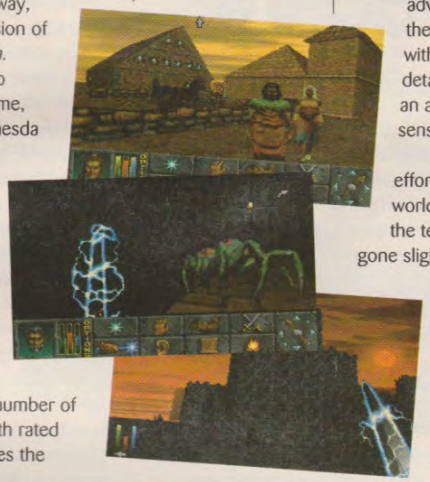
Long delayed and eagerly awaited — but is it the ultimate computer roleplaying game?

VITAL INFO

A roleplaying game for the PC
£44.99
Virgin/Bethesda Softworks
0171 368 2255
Out now
http://www.vie.co.uk/vie
http://www.bethsoft.com

Daggerfall casts you as a young but loyal retainer of the Emperor, sent to the western lands of Daggerfall on two missions. Ostensibly you are to investigate the reports that the land's dead ruler has returned from the grave and now haunts its capital city – something that the Emperor finds unsettling, because in life the King was an honourable man. You must also try to recover certain letters from the Emperor of a personal nature which never arrived at their destination.

In almost every way, *Daggerfall* is an extension of its predecessor, *Arena*. Although there are two central plots to the game, the developers at Bethesda have made every effort to create a living, breathing fantasy world, in which you can pursue whatever goals you wish.



The game itself is played from a first-person 3D view. The system is based on a number of statistics and skills, both rated from 1 to 100, and uses the familiar concepts of character class and experience level.

What makes *Daggerfall* stand out is the flexibility on offer. As well as an impressive range of standard classes, you can design your own from the ground up, selecting special abilities, skill groups and attribute modifiers. Flexibility is one of *Daggerfall's* key strengths. As well as creating your own class, you can design and use your own spells and magic items. Likewise, you're afforded almost complete freedom as to your adventurers choices during the game. This is combined with the sheer scope and detail of the world to create an almost overwhelming sense of scope and depth.

Unfortunately, in its efforts to create a 'whole world' in which to adventure, the team behind the game has gone slightly over the top in many areas. Perhaps the best examples are the towns. Every single one is mapped out in full. Although you are provided with an automap that shows which buildings are shops, temples and guilds, the only way to find out what a shop sells is to trudge through town and find it. To buy something, you have to enter the shop and look at each of the shelves in turn. It doesn't take long for this to pall, and you end up wishing for a menu system – which shop do you want to go to, and once there what do you want to buy or sell?

If you're prepared to spend the time playing *Daggerfall*, its size and scope can be rewarding, and in many ways it's the nearest computer equivalent to the freedom of a real roleplaying game. However, in a tabletop RPG there's a ref to make judgements about what's interesting and what should be skipped over, and this is what *Daggerfall* lacks.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Mecha Carnage

1/300th scale SF miniatures rules
£4.50
Gomi Designs
01449 720330
Out now

Mecha Carnage

One of the heartening things about the games business is that there's still space in it for small-scale companies or creators to do their thing. Gomi Design's Tim Parnell has done just that with this 36-page rulebook for 1/300th and 1/295th scale miniatures combat between Japanese animation's giant robots.

Lightly but competently illustrated and clearly laid out, the book comes with a pull-out cardstock centre section listing quick reference rules and a no-nonsense sheet of counters. The rules are seated in four chapters and five appendices, providing systems for construction, movement and combat before detailing various systems, campaign ideas and notes on outsized designs.

Mecha designs are built on the ubiquitous 'points' system, stemming from combinations in tech level and size. Tabletop gamers familiar with these kinds of construction rules will pick this one up in no time. Although strongly written from an animé fan's standpoint, Parnell is good enough to give the uninitiated a list of inspirational viewing (the only catch is that over half of it is unavailable in the UK) and this in no way detracts from the clean feel of the system. Most of animé's favoured robot gadgets are provided in outline form, and unlike a lot of 'cottage industry' games publications, there are a fair few examples of ready-made vehicles and weapons, enabling gamers to pick up and play right off the bat.

There are some nice ideas and spins that only a long-time gamer might think of in the text, and while a few glitches and omissions do show up here and there – the rules for mecha transformations into submarine varieties, for instance – by and large *Mecha Carnage* does its job neatly and with a minimum of fuss.

Jim Swallow Score 6/10

MasterBook Companion

MasterBook Companion

A supplement for *MasterBook*
£9.95
West End Games
001 717 253 6990
Out now

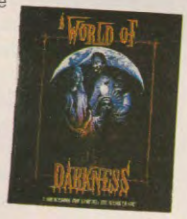
The *MasterBook* system is a set of generic rules used by West End Games to support a number of roleplaying games, each of which has been published as a sourcebook for the system. Since its original release in 1994 there have been many additions and new rules options published in the various books. The aim of the *MasterBook Companion* is to collect all of these in one volume, as well as adding some completely new material.

The book is split into chapters, each dealing with a specific subject. First come background advantages and compensations for use in character generation, then a selection of new skills and equipment. The fourth chapter, on magic, offers a range of pre-designed spells for use with the system, and some hints on creating your own. Then comes the vehicle combat system first published in *The World of Tank Girl*, and an all-new world creation system. The book closes with a discussion of cross-genre games, a full index to the *MasterBook* system, and finally notes on converting between *MasterBook* and the *D6* system used in *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*.

You can't really fault the *MasterBook Companion*. It achieves what it sets out to do, providing *MasterBook* referees with a range of new material and previously published rules in a convenient form. It's certainly not a particularly exciting release, but it is a worthwhile one.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

with some of the old material left out and some new updates included.



There are 100 pages of new material, most of it first class, and new artwork throughout the supplement. Unfortunately, the chapter on North America is rather poor with only the briefest of outlines, although it does revise New York which has now become a city of constant warfare rather than a Sabbat stronghold.

However, the rest is excellent stuff, covering almost the whole of the world, specifically the Caribbean, Central and South America, Arabia, Egypt, Africa, China and Australia. The one obvious omission is details on the elusive Eastern Kindred, but that's because White Wolf is squeezing a whole sourcebook out of them.

Details include the history and politics of the Kindred in each region, notable vampires and other supernaturals, the major cities and who rules them, as well as story seeds. Each area has a genuinely distinctive flavour and I'm already planning to drop my group into the middle of the eternal party that is the Caribbean. This is a first class sourcebook which opens up a whole world of fresh challenges for players and Storytellers.

Mark Barter Score 8/10

Utatti Asfet

Set against the backdrop of the Gulf War, this campaign set takes a group of investigators all around the world, or at least to Tonga, New Orleans and The Sudan. A first read gives the impression of a very well researched campaign which has sprung from the actual gaming sessions of the authors, Owen Guthrie and Toivo Luck. There's certainly a wealth of useful material for any referee here; this campaign is packed with maps, NPCs and well-described situations. However, despite all this good work, it suffers from the problem that many referees find when dealing with 1990s *CoC* – it's a bit too easy to play your way through this campaign with superior firepower as your ally, rather than superior brainpower.

Having said that, there is plenty to recommend this book, and although you may not feel able to run it as it stands, a little work on your behalf would undoubtedly turn the excellent basic story into a sure-fire winner for any kind of *CoC* campaign. One way to go about this is to move the campaign back in time to the '20s. This makes the vast amount of travelling in this campaign a bit more leisurely, and requires some careful thought on behalf of the referee to weave those journeys into the plot, but would, to my mind, make for a much better story.

I for one look forward to playing more work from these two newcomers to the world of games publishing. This is certainly a very promising start.

Steve Faragher Score 7/10

Utatti Asfet
A 1990s campaign for *Call of Cthulhu*
£11.99
Chaosium
001 510 547 7681
Out now

Privateer 2: The Darkening

Yet another sequel, this time to Origin's version of *Elite*. Rather than sharing the same background as the *Wing Commander* games, though, *Privateer 2* is set in a small, self-contained galaxy made up of three systems linked by jump routes, and several planets. You are cast as Lev Arris, a mystery man who is recovered in a cryo-stasis pod from a crashed starship. Upon regaining consciousness you discover that you have no memory of your previous life, and there are no computer records of your past.

Privateer 2: The Darkening
A science fiction adventure game for the PC
£44.99
Electronic Arts
01753 549442
Out now

The game itself, then, is a combination of trading and space combat, interspersed with full-motion video scenes in which you gradually uncover the mystery of your past. The space combat sections are impressively fast-moving and fun to play, with highly detailed SVGA graphics, and the trading section is fairly simple to get to grips with. There's also a large number of ships and upgrades on which to spend your hard-earned cash, and an equally sizeable range of special missions that can be undertaken if you're feeling in a more mercenary frame of mind. The 'plot', as it is, relies on you following a fairly simple trail of clues, and is aided by a variety of helpful characters who point you in the right direction.

The Darkening is one of the better attempts to combine an 'interactive movie' with a real game, and offers a fair degree of enjoyment for a while. Eventually, though, the space combat and trading become repetitive, and once you've finished the plot once, there's little reason to play the game again, although there are some sub-plots that vary from game to game. Fun while it lasts, but still not a true *'Elite* for the 90s'.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Midnight Circus

Always on the look-out for a new attraction...

Midnight Circus is a crossover supplement designed for all five of White Wolf's *Storytelling* games, allowing the various *World of Darkness* denizens to co-operate or compete. Be warned, though, you'll almost certainly need a small library of reference books if you want to use this sourcebook to its full advantage.

The History of the Circus is presented as a collection of extracts from myths, folklore, poems and newspaper reports. These are pleasingly atmospheric in themselves and can also be used as handouts to players to slowly reveal more and more about the Circus. To avoid confusion, all these hints and suggestions are clarified in a paper written by a Son of Ether mage who has, of course, mysteriously died.

The Whole Sick Crew details the denizens of the Circus, from the lowly workers and captive acts up to the Infernal Trinity who run the whole show, and it is a pretty impressive collection of freaks, lost souls and sinister masterminds. The Circus describes the Big Top and sideshows at some length and the snares set for those who enjoy them. It also discusses the Circus' metaphysical nature (oh yes – this is White Wolf, after all), outlining both the dark powers that act as its patrons and the hope that lies at its heart.

VITAL INFO
A crossover sourcebook for the *World of Darkness* setting
£11.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now
http://www.white-wolf.com/

Bread and Circuses offers brief and unconvincing advice on crossover rules, but no advice on why a group of disparate or even hostile supernaturals would work together. The Waste Land is a strong if overcrowded adventure in which the Circus' arrival in New York acts as a catalyst for all kinds of nasty goings-on. The Appendix has suggestions on running a chronicle for characters working in the Circus but is, however, a bit threadbare.

The authors are upfront in acknowledging the most obvious inspiration for the whole package – Ray Bradbury's *Something This Wicked This Way Comes*. A Ringmaster who collects souls and delivers them to a little girl dressed in Egyptian garb and the Inside-Out Man. A Hall of Mirrors that confronts the characters with their greatest fears and desires. The magnificently grotesque Cone of Flesh, King of the Freaks. These images should give you a flavour of the Circus and whether it will appeal to you.

There's nothing startlingly original here, but all the old clichés are given enough of a twist to make them interesting. The emphasis is on illusion and misdirection as much as confrontation, which may frustrate some players. It is more likely to work for groups that enjoy investigation and roleplaying than those who like to break heads, and is better suited for experienced and powerful characters. I'd be more inclined to use it as a grab-bag of ideas and colourful characters than as a campaign, however your players may have more of a taste for the Circus than mine.

Mark Barter Score 7/10

Undermountain: Maddgoth's Castle

The nostalgia boom continues unabated with platform shoes, 8-bit computer games and the *Dungeon Crawl* adventures. TSR's new series transports players back to the first 'great dungeon' of Undermountain in a bash that stresses action above subtlety.

Undermountain: Maddgoth's Castle
An *AD&D Forgotten Realms* adventure
£4.99
TSR
01223 212517
Out now

Maddgoth's Castle is a relatively new area of Undermountain, which is home to a treacherous wizard who's filled his fortress with stolen spell books. The players' task is to break and nick as much as they can carry. This very possible mission is made a little less appealing for three simple reasons.

The Planewalker's Handbook

"It ain't what you do but the way that you do it... that's what gets results!"

VITAL INFO

A supplement for *AD&D Planescape*
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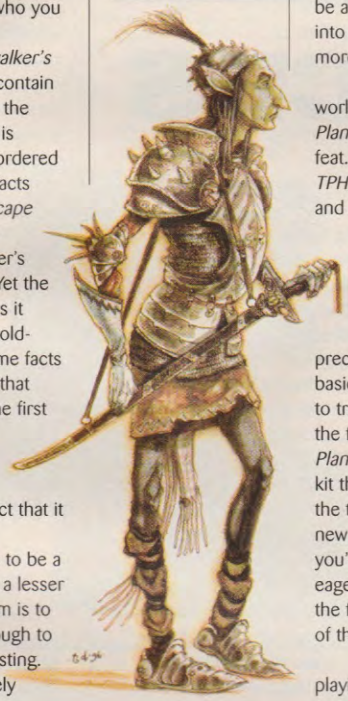
It's one of life's great quirks that trashy lines often contain valuable nuggets of philosophy. The lyrics of Fun Boy Three/Bananarama's hit is a case in point, because it encompasses the core ethic of *The Planewalker's Handbook*. A practical guide for players in the multiverse, it aims to teach both planars and primes that the secret of survival 'ain't who you are, it's what you know'.

And while *The Planewalker's Handbook* doesn't actually contain that much new information, the 'old' information it contains is clearly presented, logically ordered and well explained. Pulling facts from many different *Planescape* sources, the Walker's guide works perfectly as a beginner's introduction to the Planes. Yet the encyclopedic range of topics it deals with means that even old-hands will find there are some facts they didn't know and a few that they plain misunderstood the first time round.

What makes *The Planewalker's Handbook*, truly great, though, is the fact that it lies to you.

On the jacket it claims to be a survival guide. And while to a lesser extent this is true, its real aim is to keep you alive just long enough to die somewhere really interesting. Players are fairly and squarely warned against the kind of innocent (but stupid) actions that will get them killed within seconds of arrival in Sigil. But this guide is so crammed with juicy hints about what the weirder Planes hold that beginners and experienced players alike will not be able to resist leaping headlong into even greater peril in an even more inhospitable place.



Codifying the sprawling worlds, peoples and powers of the *Planescape* multiverse is no mean feat. Essentially a Player's Guide, *TPH's* sense of style, graphic wit and *Planescape's* own brand of mind-bending lunacy means that, even if you know most of the facts it contains, the book remains massively readable. Written with precision, it progresses from the basic 'what are the planes and how to travel between them', through the factions of Sigil, to *Planewalker* kits and the kit they carry. So that by the time you get to the new 'Power of Belief' you're fully prepped and eager to tackle some of the fearsome mysteries of the system.

If your group is playing a *Planescape* campaign this is an essential purchase. If you're a referee thinking of trying a new system, buy this before the boxed set to get a real feel of just how wonderfully bizarre multiplanar adventures can be. In fact the only people who shouldn't consider getting hold of *The Planewalker's Handbook* are roleplaying virgins, and that's simply because *Planescape* is such a fast and loose system that a certain foundation of 'normal terrestrial adventures' help to keep the whole thing in perspective.

Because, as Kenny Rodgers once said, "you've got to know when to walk away and know when to hide," and that's the fun of *Planescape* – and it's what *The Planewalker's Handbook* aims to hammer home to berks before it's too late!

Trenton Webb Score 9/10

In short, then, another excellent expansion for one of the better CCGs around. *Rage* has never seemed to be a massive hit, which is a shame, because it's been one of the most consistently high quality games around, and is ideally suited to multi-player games. In fact, this is its only real problem – it's a much better game with three or four players than with only two.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

Chicago Chronicles Volume 3

Chicago Chronicles Volume 3
A city sourcebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade*
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This is the final volume in the reprint of the original campaign for *Vampire* based in Chicago and its surrounds. Although advertised on the back cover as the grand climax it is set chronologically before the apocalyptic *Under A Blood Run Moon*.

Ashes to Ashes follows on directly from *Baptism of Fire* in the *Vampire* rulebook. The players come to Chicago to introduce themselves to Prince Lodin, only to find that he has been kidnapped and that they are being used as scapegoats. Their search for him introduces some of the main players and political intrigues in the city. There is also a Secondary Story where the players act out a flashback that gives insight into the NPCs' motives, a splendid idea that White Wolf never developed.

Blood Bond allows the players to choose sides between Anarchs and Camarilla, and introduces them to the Sabbat who can be friend or foe. They also witness the devastating effect of the blood bond as one of Lodin's Brood is targeted for revenge. The maps and stats are missing as they were on the original inside cover.

Milwaukee By Night is an excellent sourcebook for one of *Chicago's* neighbours. If the players get tired of the labyrinth politics of Chicago they can move to this city of warfare, where power plays are more open and where the introductory adventure posits them as kingmakers.

These adventures gain greater depth as pieces in a developing campaign of some stature and in their vivid depiction of what it is to be a vampire. The players get plenty of drama, but are also encouraged to explore their own natures, torn between their fading humanity and the Beast. Excellent stuff only slightly spoilt by editorial blunders.

Mark Barter Score 8/10

The first of these is that Maddgoth's Castle exists within shrunken reality, and to enter it players must be reduced to the size of mice. A matter of scale that's emphasised by the presence of creatures within the castle that haven't been reduced, so even the most mundane monsters become terrible menaces.

The second issue is that of the retro feel. Players who have only gamed in the more recent and sophisticated realms are in for a shock because the entire *Monstrous Compendium* is hurled at them. There's no overall theme or elegant ecosystem because the monsters here just play up the dungeon's puzzles or catch the party unawares.

The third and most fatal problem for the party is that control of Maddgoth's Castle is currently being disputed by two powerful forces, who are both seeking the same prize as the party.

The resultant package proves a little too disjointed and fatal to be that much fun. It accurately maintains a retro feel but lacks the focus of the *Lost Level* - the previous *Dungeon Crawl* outing. The plot's got too many twists to be a 'classic' treasure trawl and the situations are too old-fashioned to satisfy modern gamers.

Trenton Webb Score 5/10

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Legacy of the Tribes

Following on the heels of the equally impressive *War of the Amazon* (**arcane** 7), *Legacy of the Tribes* is the latest expansion set for White Wolf's collectable card game, *Rage*, based on the *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* roleplaying game.

The new set of just over 200 cards features the same high quality of production and artwork as the rest of the *Rage* line. There are some neat new cards on offer, including five special edition ultra-rare 'foil' cards for the dedicated collector, some suitably vicious combat cards, and a selection of mages, vampires, wraiths and faeries for those players who want to branch out a little from werewolves.

Legacy of the Tribes features a new type of card, the Territory. These cards are a cross between Gifts and Realms, and although they can't be cancelled they can be attacked. In many ways they are an improved version of the Battlefields introduced in *War of the Amazon*.

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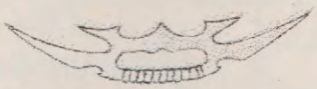

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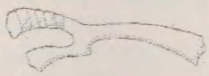

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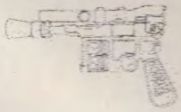

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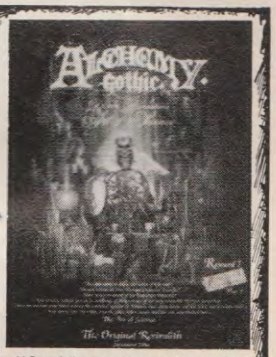

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Of course, given his phenomenal success, there's been a staggering amount of Batman merchandising produced over this time – literally thousands of toys, miniature figures, badges, T-shirts, watches, mugs, children's costumes and many other weird and wonderful gadgets. Chip Kidd, an acclaimed designer, is a particularly passionate Batman fan who collects everything he can find that's in any way related to his favourite character. And this book is his tribute to Batman. It's a large-format hardback packed full with photographs and illustrations of everything from the very earliest Batman comics and toys right through to the present day, together with the author's often thought-provoking and insightful comments.

Simply put, *Batman Collected* is a must-buy for any self-respecting Batman fan. It's stunningly designed throughout and utterly fascinating to look at, full of incredible photographs that often manage to take cheap, throw-away items and transform them into something that truly captures the essence of the character himself. You can feast your eyes on some rare, limited edition models and early artists' sketches, which appear alongside apple jam jars and 'Batman Cola' bottles. Running throughout the book is Chip Kidd's commentary on the stages of Batman's development, history and popular appeal. All in all, *Batman Collected* is quite simply superb. Okay, so it may not be of much actual use, but nevertheless, die-hard Batman fans are sure to find themselves returning to it again and again.

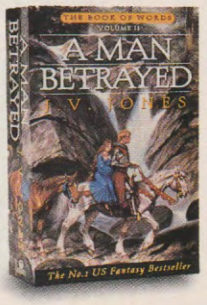
Andy Butcher Score 9/10

"Any book about Batman is by definition also about obsession: Bruce Wayne is unable to *not* fight; I am unable not to pursue collecting Batman."

A Man Betrayed

There is a tendency among fantasy authors to write books that are far too long. The excuse is that this extra space is needed to flesh out imaginary worlds, but the argument fails when, with the exception of a few place names and coastal contours (maybe some elves in the forest, or maybe, as here, not), all these worlds end up looking pretty similar and distinctly devoid of background colour and imagination. A more cynical explanation for the loquaciousness of the genre's authors would be that the fantasy literature market is believed to demand a decent quantity of words for its money, while quality is not quite so highly esteemed.

Pleasing, then, to find an inventive writer who is obviously acutely aware of these problems and yet, rather than abandon the genre, or its publishers' and readers'



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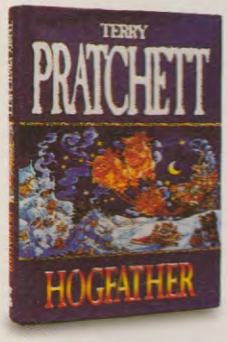
Hogfather



by **Terry Pratchett**

Published by

Victor Gollancz

Hardback £15.99

Out in November

Last month, I reviewed the latest offering from the superb Robert Rankin – his surreal excursion into a world of resurrected Hitlers and prop shops. This month the acclaimed Terry Pratchett has bombarded me with his own highly individual style of humour, one every bit as relentless as Rankin's, if not quite as beer-orientated.

Hogfather, this autumn's addition to the *Discworld* series of novels, is all about Father Christmas (in as much as Pratchett's tales are ever about anything in particular), and the great man's strange disappearance. The usual collection of characters appear – Susan, the daughter of Mort, the various eccentric wizards and the irrepressible

"'Wow-Wow sauce,' said Ridcully. 'Finest condiment known to man.'"

Death. Jokes stream through the prose thicker than traffic through Knightsbridge on Saturday, and contrived situations arise that are destined to end up as little more than a device for yet more forced humour – it's a shame but, after you've read some *Discworld* books, you can spot them a mile away.

Pratchett's jokes are becoming, with each book he writes, a little more strained, I feel. Yes, there are plenty of pages which have a line or two that make you chuckle out loud, but equally, to get to these occasional gems you have to wade through a fair about of unfunny tosh. Die-hard fans will no doubt laugh their way through the entirety of *Hogfather*, but occasional browsers of Pratchett's works are not going to find this one of his best. Not quite hogwash, sure, but *Hogfather* is Pratchett ticking over, rather than revving his joke engine hard.

Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10

Pratchett and Gollancz

– a quarter of a century on...

It is now, believe it or not, 25 years since Terry Pratchett started writing for Victor Gollancz, and at the launch of *Hogfather*, which coincided with his silver jubilee, the London publishing house seemed extremely happy with the way the relationship was developing – the man's knocking out a *Discworld* novel every six months, and while he says he's going to start slowing down, nobody really believes him.

You see, he likes it all too much. He keeps going, not for the money, of course, but because he "has to write" – though maybe the fame and adulation that arise from his incessant promotional activities is also a driving force. Either way, it's undoubtedly an impressive library of work. So, where exactly did it all begin?

Apparently, the young Pratchett sent half a manuscript to the nearest publisher he could find in the Yellow Pages and received a cheque and contract by return of post. No countless rejection letters and sleepless nights for him, and so now it's all wine and canapés in exotic places. So, the implied advice to any budding authors out there would seem to be not to despair after repeated rejections – just write better books, churn them out twice a year and enjoy the concomitant global celebrity that your brilliance will attract. Quite straightforward, really – and you will also have the satisfaction of knowing that you're keeping a lot of people in wine and canapés.

demands, insists on writing strictly formulaic medieval fantasy – and does it rather well. People are 'well met', eat offal at fares and drink cider in taverns, but Jones pulls no punches in describing just how nasty, brutal and short medieval life can be. She also cuts a sharp dichotomy between the bawdy and cruel and the pure fairytale motifs of chivalry, chastity and the conniving machinations of unscrupulous, and in one particular case, undeniably evil, nobles.

Sometimes Jones bangs on for a few thousand words about nothing in particular, but the end product is there and much of the development is engaging and sometimes even funny. Amusing cameos break up an otherwise fairly humourless account of power-mongering, and Jones displays a good turn of phrase (when she wants to) and has the

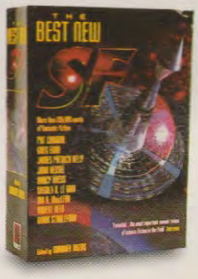
"Men and armies will wait upon your bidding. Jewels and riches will be yours beyond compare. More than a queen, you will be an empress."

crucial ability to be very succinct – but again, only when she wants to be. There is padding, but a well-placed gag here begs forgiveness – and, for the most part, gets it because the characters are real and the plot, ridiculously predictable at every stage (as it should be), is an old friend.

Melliandra and Jack flee the oppressive fiefdom of their castle home and embark on a roller-coaster medieval road trip – Melliandra because she has been betrothed to a man she can never love, and Jack because the kitchen staff where he works are starting to get more than a little pissed off with his 'magic tricks'. Jack is sought by the knight Tawl, who needs him to fulfil an ancient prophesy, and Melli is sought by anything in breeches because she's a bit of a cracker. The pair are also keenly chased by factions within the castle (for pretty much the same reasons as why they left in the first place) and circumstances and war conspire to make sure they get separated with a regularity that smacks of carelessness.

Anyway, the American version of *Master and Fool*, the final part of the trilogy, has just arrived, so soon I'll know about Melli's baby and whether Jack's magic is strong and focused enough to defeat the evil Kylock. I rather suspect it will be in the end, though perhaps only just. It should be an exciting climax.

Jonathan Palmer Score 8/10



edited by

Gardner Dozois

Published by

Raven

Paperback £7.99

Out now

The Best New SF

There are some extraordinarily good entries in this excellent ninth edition of the hugely successful *Best New SF* series (the anthology that collates the year's best new short fiction) – and at £8 for a quarter of a million words from some of the biggest names in the genre, it's definitely good value for money.

Worth the asking price alone is the first story, an Ursula K Le Guin novella set in the universe of the Ekumen – the background to her classic novel *The Left hand of Darkness*. A typically detailed and passionate story about an alien culture, told with a firmly feminist slant, it proves a difficult act to follow, and if I say that none of the other works here quite manage to dislodge the lasting impression it makes, that is more of a compliment to the ability of Le Guin than a denigration of the anthology's other writers. Le Guin has a sensitivity, an eloquence and an attention to social and cultural detail that other sci-fi writers can only admire. The appearance of two impressive stories from her here should serve as a poignant reminder that she has a great many other works out there which need to be read, too.

"It slammed into my side, a storm of razors and diamond edged fury, hooks and claws extended."

From *Radio Waves* by Michael Swanwick

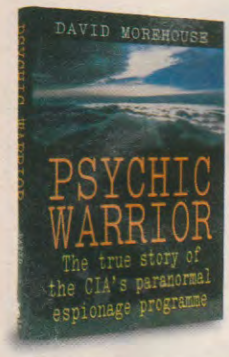
Greg Egan weighs in with two good entries as well. One of the hard-boiled bunch of science writers, he's not everyone's cup of tea; as likely to make you frown and scratch your head in puzzlement as rivet you to the page. There's a thin line between provoking someone with an interesting idea and blinding them with science. (Have you ever tried to visualise an alien biochemistry which operates in 16 dimensions?) But that's another reason why you should consider buying this edition – it's possible to expand your fantasies

of the future in ways you wouldn't normally dream of. The possibilities and issues of a virtual future have also found their way into a whole crop of recent short fiction, and this collection reflects this with two provocative cyberpunk yarns, one an intriguing murder mystery from Pat Cadigan and the other a strange love story by David Marusek. Terraforming also seems to be a popular theme at the moment, and there is a particularly good story about it here by Robert Reed.

Don't look for any spaceships, laser fighters or bug-eyed monsters, though – these writers aren't nearly as crass as that. Keep watching *Star Wars* if that's all you need to fire your imagination. Here you will find, instead, a multiverse which is far more strange, surreal and frightening. It's recommendation enough to say that you may find yourself still thinking about some of the ideas this anthology raises when the next edition comes around. Superior sci-fi.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 9/10

Psychic Warrior



by **David Morehouse**
Published by
Michael Joseph
Hardback £16.99
Out now

In the wake of *The X-Files*, a lot of interesting stories, theories and wild speculations have been brushed off and brought back into the public spotlight as newspapers, magazines and television programmes have all rushed to cash in on the show's popularity. How many of these 'true stories' are anything but is something we'll probably never know, but it does seem that at least some of them have a basis in truth.

One such set of rumours that have been at least partially confirmed concern the US Government's research into so-called 'psychic spies'. The CIA and Defence Intelligence Agency do seem to have admitted to spending a pretty hefty sum of money on a project dedicated to 'remote viewing' – a pseudonym for clairvoyance. Allegedly, properly trained individuals are able to 'see' distant and even future events, anywhere around the world. It's certainly not difficult to understand the immense appeal of such a technique for any intelligence agency.

What remains somewhat unclear, though, is the extent to which the research was successful. *Psychic Warrior* is the story of David Morehouse, an ex-US army officer recruited into 'Project Stargate', as it's now known, who claims that when he rebelled against the direction the project was taking, the full weight of the US Intelligence community was brought to bear against him and his family.

Morehouse's story begins while he was still in the army, and was almost killed by a stray machine gun round during a training exercise in the Middle East. Luckily the round, while knocking him out, didn't penetrate his helmet, and he survived. While unconscious, however, he had a strange hallucination/vision, and these continued afterwards.

> **"Pursue peace. Teach peace, and the path to it will be made known to you."**

Soon after the accident, Morehouse was 'recruited' into the remote viewing project and left the army. The book tells the story of his training and experiences, culminating in his attempt to 'go public' when the object of the research was changed from passive viewing to imposing 'influence' upon remote targets.

Now, on the surface of it, this sounds like a fascinating story, both from a real world and gaming point of view. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite manage to live up to its promise. Perhaps the key problem is one of style. Morehouse has decided to tell his story in the form of a novelization, rather than a factual account. Not only does this tend to make it sound like fiction, but Morehouse isn't much of a writer – by the time you've got 20 or 30 pages into the book you start praying that he won't use the words 'transformation' or 'metamorphosis' for at least the next paragraph – and his melodramatic style tends to make the story sound even less likely.

Psychic Warrior does make you ask yourself a lot of questions, but sadly not many of them are very positive. The first thing you have to decide is whether or not Morehouse believes what he's saying. Sincerity all but drips from every sentence, but it's all a little too overdone for comfort. Then, even if you do conclude that he's telling the truth as he sees it, you then have to try to work out whether he's sane or a raving lunatic.

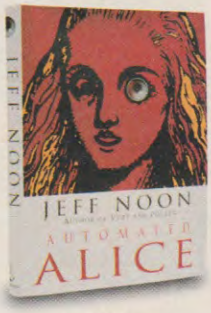
It's not that his story is too far-fetched, it's more that what he describes seems too, well, clichéd to be real. Mysterious figures appearing in visions and hinting at 'matters of great importance' or urging him to 'turn to peace', references to angels, spiritual meetings with dead friends who are concerned only with the good of the living – it's all a bit much, really. You can't help but wonder whether Morehouse is just a great scam artist chuckling away while his royalties roll in, or whether the severe blow he received to his head, rather than freeing some 'inner power', simply knocked a screw loose. The lack of any real corroborating evidence doesn't help either, nor do the somewhat vague references to some of the critical aspects of the research.

On the other hand, Morehouse's career record and qualifications are impressive, to say the least, and some of what he writes sounds frighteningly possible and all too real. The problem is that, as it stands, the book just doesn't give you enough hard information to make up your mind.

Nonetheless, if you are willing to make the effort to read this book, there *is* a lot of potentially interesting stuff here, especially for referees of modern-day horror and conspiracy games. As a factual account of a fascinating and possibly very important government program, however, it's something of a let-down.

Andy Butcher Score 5/10

Automated Alice



by **Jeff Noon**
Published by
Doubleday
Hardback £14.99
Out now

Automated Alice is not another *Vurt*, and nor is it another *Pollen*. Indeed, fans of Noon's previous two works, each set in a surrealistic, drug-phased Manchester of the future, are sure to be bemused by this accomplished author's sudden change of tack. For *Alice* is, at its most basic level (upon which it's darn easy to read), a third *Alice in Wonderland* yarn, where Alice follows her pet parrot into an old clock, only to end up in Manchester, 1998.

Only this Manchester isn't as it's likely to be in two years. This Manchester is entirely populated by human/animal hybrids of various flavours, and poor Alice is the only pure little girl alive. The story takes Alice through her bizarre journey, for the most part of which she's accompanied by an automaton version of herself (the automated Alice of the title).

This is a novel of locations, each of which get increasingly strange and, it has to be said, contrived. The characters which inhabit each of the wild situations in the book are generally weird enough to keep you reading, though after a while the relentless pace at which Alice blunders from quirk to freak starts to pall, and an element of the ordinary is something that you soon begin to yearn for. Noon has previously excelled at bringing the strange into the his works and making it somehow believable. With *Automated Alice*, however, the suspension of disbelief is impossible to attain; deliberate this may be, but it doesn't quite work throughout a novel which stretches to more than 250 pages.

> **"'That looks like a very crushed Asian lobster,' Alice stated. 'That lobster is indeed a crustacean!' the badgerman replied."**

And while on the subject of length, it has to be said that *Automated Alice* is an extremely quick read (and it's a book which you're unlikely to want to read again in a hurry). And so, for the asking price of a penny under 15 quid, one has to ask the question: "Is this really entertaining enough to warrant such an expense?" Whereas with *Vurt* and *Pollen* the answer to this same question would have been an unequivocal "Yes", in this instance the same cannot be said. If you want to experience the latest Noon novel, my advice is wait until the release of the paperback, or borrow a mate's copy.

On a somewhat higher level, I suspect that Noon is making some comment or other about society, or something equally as profound. Maybe I'm right, quite possibly I'm wrong, but if he is, it was lost on me. His latest book reads like a children's story with some grown-up words thrown in, and while enjoyable, it certainly doesn't possess the same grip on the reader that his previous two novels do. I kept on expecting someone to pull a Vurt feather from their mouth and for the plot to come crashing down to Noon's twisted vision of a future reality. Instead, Alice finds her way home and everyone lives happily ever after. Which can't be right, surely? Unless, that is, Jeff Noon is merely playing games with his devout audience and *Automated Alice* is no more that a story he wanted to write.

Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10

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arcane scribblings

We covered LARP last issue, and a number of you were extremely pleased about it...

Dear arcane,
At last, after 13 issues you finally print an article about live-action roleplaying (or LARP). It was undoubtedly overdue and extremely welcome. There is, however, a point I would like to make with reference to the feature...

Nowhere in the main article about The Gathering event was there mention of the other types of LARP which people can get involved in. What about a mention for groups such as ours (the UK Masquerade) which covers Vampire games, or indeed any of the many murder mystery-type games that you can play? The *Star Wars RPG* and now *Call of Cthulhu* are to get LARP versions of their rules, and yet this was not mentioned in the feature. Please, please cover these as well – if you don't then many people will miss out on these other systems.

Nigel Boulton, UK Masquerade

Simon Cooke's feature was about his personal experiences of The Gathering event, rather than a general introduction to live-action roleplaying. For this reason other systems weren't mentioned. If, however, there's enough demand to do a follow-up feature, with a run-down of the various types of LARP which people can get involved in, then we'll happily do one. So, are you lot interested or not? Let me know and I'll see what I can do.

On a more general note about live-action roleplaying, we'd like to get a feel for the number of **arcane** *readers who actually partake in this form of gaming. We're currently having the results of the reader survey (issue 10) analysed, and we'll let you know the results in issue 16.*

Dear arcane,
I enjoyed your feature on The Gathering LARP event, and was amused to see the repeated sour references to the people from Curious Pastimes stealing the Lorien Trust road signs. Given the Lorien Trust's alleged chronic disorganisation, are you absolutely sure they didn't forget to put up their signs and then had to think up a plausible story?

I hadn't heard the road sign story, but a few miles down the road at Drum Hill, rumours abounded that a nameless someone with Lorien Trust sympathies had called the police on to the Renewal site with a bogus drugs tip-off.

There is room for two (or more) LARP events over the August bank holiday weekend – one for people who like the sort of plot that involves characters of high rank with drow muggings and the like, and one for people who prefer roleplaying at the Drum Hill site. Perhaps next year you can send an **arcane** staffer to each event, and report on them in an unbiased manner.

Stevy Haworth, Bristol

Whether there was sign stealing and bogus police calls going on or not, I think that our feature demonstrated that live-action roleplaying can indeed be a great deal of fun, and it's something that perhaps those of us who have never entertained the idea should give a go. And yes, if we get an invite, perhaps we will send someone along to the Renewal event, as well as someone to The Gathering. It would be only fair, after all.

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with **arcane** *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked '***arcane** *scribblings' and addressed to* **arcane**, *30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. The slightly more technically advanced among you can send us a fax on (01225) 732252, while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:*
`arcane@futurenet.co.uk` *or visit our Web site at:*
`http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html`.
We look forward to hearing from you.

Dear arcane,
I would like to respond to the 'On the Soapbox' piece which appeared in **arcane** 13 and which dealt with LARP.

As a seasoned LARPer, it was refreshing to read about my hobby. While I agree with much that Stuart said in the column, I would have to disagree with his flippant comment regarding the Bradford University Vampire Society. Yes, by being noticed by the public the group broke up the Masquerade and then stomped on the bits. But to have an armed response unit called would seem to indicate that the society went a little bit too far.

I am a regular monster for a Vampire group – Reading by Night. Recently we played a game that ran right through Reading town centre; we had four gunfights, two explosions, and a bunch of zombies were slaughtered in a graveyard. However, we were entirely unnoticed by the public.

Why? Because we were a) discreet, b) careful about the locations chosen, and c) banned all physical weapons. We also informed the local police that we were holding the event, and that a relatively large group of people would be wandering around the streets late on a Saturday night. The *Vampire Mind's Eye Theatre Combat* system easily allows for this kind of activity.

By using our common sense when dealing with the public and the police, we can avoid situations like the one that the Bradford group created.

Katherine Minchin, Reading

Agreed – there's absolutely no reason why LARPers shouldn't be able to get on with their game quite happily without getting in the way of the general public. Let's hope that other LARP groups take heed of Katherine's solid advice.

Dear arcane,
I find it strange that tabletop roleplayers pick on LARP, because there is no reason to. LARP is just an extension of what all good tabletop roleplayers try to achieve. How many tabletop referees out there use music, sound effects, lighting and even sometimes the odd bit of costuming with regards to the players to get the atmosphere right? In the past when I have run *Star Wars* people have brought authentic props, and even a full sized, good model of R2D2. When playing an F.B.I. game the players wore suits and brought other props such as torches and the like for when the light went off.

LARP is just the ultimate extension of this. I have only been live roleplaying about five times a number of years ago, and was overwhelmed by the experience. You are nervous in the dark, and even though you know they are false the costumes have you on edge, and you feel the tension and excitement that is hard to generate around the table. You may think you can, but you just can't generate the same feeling. You become that character, and identify with it more so than in any tabletop game. In short, given a good adventure and a mature group of live roleplayers, LARP is what all tabletop gamers search for. I was somewhat sceptical, but it's true.

Ian O'Rourke, e-mail

Yes, some referees do loosen the boundaries between LARP and tabletop roleplaying, but it's one thing to bring along a pretend lightsabre to a Star Wars *session and quite another to dress up as Luke and run around a disused factory.*

Dear arcane,
Before I launch into the main point of my letter may I first congratulate you on what is rapidly turning into the best independent gaming magazine on the market. The quality of the articles and regulars is maintained at a consistently high standard.

However, on to Paul Pettengale's review of *Rolo's* (sic) *Guide to All Things Magical* in issue 13. Throughout the

Born in the USA

Dear arcane,

It's a well known fact that most of the games and supplements we play are produced in the USA, and that only a few originate from here in the UK. I worry about this. If we're constantly playing characters, the precepts for which have been designed in the States, does that not result in us slowly being indoctrinated by American ideology? We have enough American rubbish on our TV screens – do we really have to put up with American roleplaying systems as well?

Simon Corram, Kensington, London

Are you suggesting that because the majority of roleplaying systems we play are American we're all going to end up acting and thinking like Americans? I can't think how that could possibly be true – these games are based on fantastical settings (for the most part), not real life. Yes, I suppose you might argue that AD&D *with its 'kill the monster and grab the treasure' mentality (which, I hasten to add, isn't actually reflected in the way that the game is played by most people) is inherently capitalist, but the political link is tenuous at best. And remember, if you don't want to play American games, you don't have to .*

review the master traveller is constantly referred to as Rolo, when in fact his true name is Volo. Second, in the same review Paul refers more than a little sarcastically to Spellfire as a new form of magic which 'just happens' to have the same name as TSR's CCG. For his information, Spellfire in the *AD&D* sense precedes the CCG by at least six years, being the central storyline of the Ed Greenwood novel of the same name. That was published in 1988, and the CCG was named after it.

Please don't assume that I've nothing better to do, but my gut reaction is that the reviews in **arcane** should be accurate, because people may be spending money based on them. And if you're going to make snide comments, which Paul is more than welcome to do, you should at least get your facts right before doing so.

Darrell Impey, London Regional Director of the RPGA

I can't agree with you enough – factual accuracy is essential if the reviews in arcane *are to retain the authority which I think they deserve. In this instance, I made a mistake – the Rolo/Volo error, I'm afraid, was one of those silly hiccups whereby the wrong button was pressed on the keyboard. Hands up, we did wrong.*

However, on the other point, as far as I am aware (and you have to remember, however vast a reviewer's knowledge of a game and its supplements, it's virtually never complete), Spellfire had never appeared fully as an AD&D *ruling before the release of* Volo's Guide to All Things Magical. *I haven't read the novel you mention, and apologise for not knowing of its existence. I shall have to start on the back catalogue of* AD&D*-related novels to ensure that a similar error doesn't happen again. Hopefully I'll be finished by the end of the millennium (if I do nothing else in the meantime).*

Dear arcane,

Having just wished to send a message into your free reader ads pages, I have a request: please could you endeavour to locate anything that has to be filled in and cut out so that it has an advert on the other side? That way we don't have to hack into valuable information. The worst example of this is the subscription form, which has the conclusion to the Encounter on the other side.

Fergus Crawford, Yeovil

It's difficult to plan for these forms, especially because adverts move around throughout the construction of the issue. However, feel free to photocopy any of the forms in arcane*, or, failing that, copy them out by hand to avoid cutting up your copy of the mag.*

Dear arcane,

Gimme your pocket snotlings! (Please.) I promise to give the little guys a good home, and I shall resist the temptation to snack on them.

Chris Miller, Coleraine, N. Ireland

Too late, we ate them already.

Dear arcane,

I bought the new edition of *Traveller* just over a week ago. The other day I read through the Quick Ship Design System, and as I read Step 3, Jump Drive, I discovered it said, "cross reference the Jump level desired with the size of the ship's hull on the Jump Drive Potential table." So I skipped a few pages ahead, searching for the table, and to my horror discovered that no such table exists! Can anyone help me?

Peter Jones, Nottingham

Oh dear. That can't be right. So, can anyone help Peter out with the location of this missing table? Let him know via the arcane *office.* →

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arcane shorts

Letters of a diminutive nature, cut from the cream of the post bag...

I'd like to say that the comment in the 'wanted' section of your free ads about weresheep was uncalled for. I have come across an adventure for *Paranoia* (it had to be really, didn't it?), in which the clones have to protect a weresheep. So there.

Sharon Johnston

Er, fine, I think.

Would it not be a fine thing if the British army was to re-equip with weapons from the Games Workshop stable?

Pete from Kidderminster

No - have you checked out the rate at which Space Marines' guns either misfire or explode, eh? It would be extremely messy.

People are always saying how lights and food and music can add atmosphere to roleplaying sessions, but no-one ever says what a great effect drugs can have on a game.

Jonny S

No, and no-one's going to say it in this magazine either!

I love the way that **arcane** is presented, the artwork and the standard of the articles is brilliant. My only disappointment is that when each issue reaches me in Australia it's over two months old!

Emma Copleston

Then move to England?

I can't stand it any longer! I keep going to my newsagent and have to look like a filth merchant if I want to get **arcane** - it's located on the top shelf you see, along with all the porn. Surely this can't be good for our image?

Jacob Princeton

It's sad but true, in some places **arcane** *has been classified as an adult magazine, and has been stocked on the top shelf. We're making a BIG effort to change this, and we are making headway!*

← Dear arcane,

I live in Australia and I'm fairly new to the roleplaying and gaming scene. I play heaps of computer games as well as *Magic: The Gathering*, and I would now like to know what play-by-mail games are available to people in Australia without each letter taking three months to get here. Can you supply me with the names and addresses of any play-by-mail companies over here in Oz?

Gordon Campbell, Northam, Western Australia

I'm sorry Gordon, but we're not aware of any Australian PBM companies. We can only report on the companies that make themselves known to us. Perhaps the managers of any Australian companies would like to get in touch and pass us their details.

Dear arcane,

Hello again! I'm just writing to say that I like you, a lot. Mainly because you devote a great deal of space to letters, and you've printed both of the mailings that I've sent you thus far. I like your new look – the reviews section used to look slightly uncomfortable, due to it shifting between VERY BIG LETTERS and uncomfortably small ones. So, many congratulations on that score.

However, I digress, for the main reason I'm writing is to express my confusion over the lack of capitalisation and the use of bold text when you refer to yourselves. In more comprehensible terms: why **arcane**, and not Arcane? We may never know.

David Dolliver, Pitlochry

It's the Men in Black – they come around just before we send an issue, point guns at our heads and force us to do it. Honest.

Dear arcane,

Leaping on the 'let's get at Andrew Rilstone' bandwagon, I'd like to point out a couple of coincidences.

First, in **arcane** 4, Dan Pergon wrote to say that we used to worry about *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks spelling doom and gloom for the roleplaying industry, and that now we have collectable card games, we're worrying all over again. But, he said, not to worry – CCGs pose no more of a threat than *FF* books did in the '80s. Then, in **arcane** 12, Andy Rilstone writes a column about the threat of CCGs to the roleplaying industry.

Later, in **arcane** 13, P Illage of Crawley wrote and said, "Creating a character which is essentially yourself is great fun, so why not give it a go?" While in the same issue, the creative Mr Rilstone writes a column about the fun he had running a game where his friends played themselves, plus a superpower or two.

Now, it's all well and good to have a magazine which includes reader input, but do we have to do all the work?

Mark Langford, Beccles

Hmm, I can see your point, but I think the two instances you quote are just what you suggested they were in the first instance – coincidences. This is certainly true in the second case, because Andrew's column arrived in the office long before the letter you mention, and so I don't think that Mr Rilstone is quite as creatively challenged as you're suggesting.

Dear arcane,

I write in response to the criticism which everyone has levelled at Andrew Rilstone in issue 13. It is all unjust and it is obvious that a lot of people missed the point altogether with respect to Andrew's suggestion that we should give playing 'ordinary people' a try.

Now don't get me wrong, I enjoy playing (and refereeing) games with superhuman, heroic characters. But surely these characters do 'normal' things too, and these should be immense fun to roleplay through. As an example, about three years ago, during my summer break from university, I returned to Liverpool and gathered my old group together for gaming sessions. I had been working on a major campaign for *Heroes Unlimited*, and wanted to use my 11-week break to get it started.

It ended up that for five days a week, 8-12 hours a day, we played nothing but this game. That amounts to over 400 hours of gaming over the entire summer. And yet the players didn't tire of the hero's life but once. Why? Because they not only played the heroic elements of their characters' lives, but all of the simple, day-to-day stuff as well. Was it boring? No chance.

Andy Meakin, Sheffield

An average of 50 hours play a week? Bloody hell – you deserve a medal.

Dear arcane,

In response to Andrew Langton's letter (of Leicester), as a previous partner of Nightfall Games, the company which first produced *SLA Industries*, and as a current employee of Wizards of the Coast UK Ltd, I am writing to inform Andrew that there is still a great deal of support for the *SLA Industries* game. The company that bought *SLA Industries'* intellectual copyright is a new American company, Jageeda Publishing, but fear not! Our good friends Dave Allsop, the original writer, and Brian 'Chippy' Dugan, one of our original artists, are re-locating Stateside to be with the game, as well as to develop new games, several of which are in the pipeline and look very nice indeed. You can contact Matt Murray (from Jageeda in the US) on dboy@wizards.com or you can contact Brian Dugan (co-ordinator of Jageeda activity in the UK) on brian.dog@ukonline.co.uk You can also contact Morton, an original writer of lots of stuff, on morton.smith@ukonline.co.uk

Anne Boylan, Marketing Executive, Wizards of the Coast UK Ltd

Good – that's cleared that up.

Dear arcane,

I have a grievance to get off my chest. You see, there are a number of prejudices and misconceptions that cause me to grind my teeth every time I open your magazine. What I am referring to is your indulgence in the sport I shall refer to as 'angst bashing', for want of a better name. I don't think I can recall a single issue where some contributor isn't wheedling plaintively, 'Cripes, I'm just a simple dungeon basher – all this character interaction is too much nonsense for a simple lad like me to put up with.'

The first RPG I was ever into was *D&D*, and I played it once. The second game was *Champions*, and I never played that. True, they were both interesting, but not quite enough for me to get into. For years I've sworn off roleplaying, even though I did buy a copy of *Call of Cthulhu* and ran it a few times.

Then in 1992 I found a copy of *Vampire 1st Edition*. A number of my friends were playing it and having a great deal of fun, so I thought I'd give it a read. I found something I'd never found previously in a game – a sense of personal involvement. I was always bored with roleplaying games for the most part because they were too simplistic, too rules bound and two-dimensional.

A lot of people roleplay because they enjoy creating a character and playing it, especially when the character is vastly different from themselves. It helps them to question viewpoints they take for granted, to develop their own perspectives by looking at themselves through someone else's eyes. Referees who disparage character-orientated roleplaying are the worst kind of coward. So, get a life and deal with it!

Michael Brown, address not given

Gulp. I don't think we can be accused of what you're suggesting.

arcane On-Line

arcane is available wherever you are in the world, at all times of the day, every day of the week. To get at it, just point your web browser at: http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html

The arcane home page is stuffed with information for all gamers.

Why spend money on new supplements for your favourite roleplaying games when you can get plenty of new material for absolutely nothing using the World Wide Web? There are dozens of roleplaying sites on the Internet, and a great many of them carry new rules, campaign material, scenarios and new equipment for the games that you're playing week in, week out. True, you've got the expense of logging on and downloading the files, but this pales into insignificance when compared with the cost of some of the new scenario and sourcebooks available on the high-street. And yes, the quality is arguably not as high, but then if it's damn-near free, it's certainly worth checking out!

Last month we looked at five sites relating to *AD&D, Call of Cthulhu, Star Wars, Vampire* and *Warhammer.* This month we look at five new sites for five very different games...

FIVE WEB SITES YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS

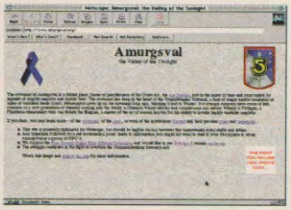
Ars Magica

What's it called?

Amurgsval

And what's it like?

This is a pretty generic site for *Ars Magica* players and referees, and indeed, those people who know nothing about the system and are thinking of giving it a go. It kicks off with a basic description of the game and how players integrate into the campaign background. Moving in deeper there are new rules, magic items and campaign background details, together with a list of extremely useful links for



http://www.amurgsval.org/

the game. One of these leads to a multi-user Internet version of *Ars Magica,* which fans should check out. All told, a basic-looking, but highly involving Web site which all players should make an effort to take a peek at.

Champions

What's it called?

Theala Sildorian's Unofficial Champions Homepage

And what's it like?

This is one page that is *completely* packed full of useful stuff for *Champions* referees. From the all-important FAQ (to help clear up those nagging rules queries), to gossip covering the game and the behind the scenes production work, this is a slick, fast site. It's also got lots of potential background information for referees to incorporate into their campaigns, a play-by-email game so you're never stuck for something to do *Champions*-wise and even a 'stick-figure theatre' (we'll let you use your imagination on that one). Wonderful.

http://www.intercom.net/user/theala/hero.html

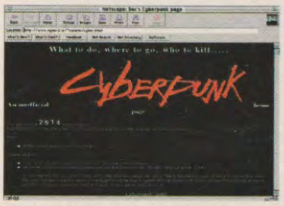
Cyberpunk

What's it called?

Where to go, what to see, who to kill

And what's it like?

This is an unofficial fan page, and consequently it's pretty slow, but if you can put up with that then there's plenty to see and do (and kill) – it's obvious that an awful lot of effort has been put into making this page useful for *Cyberpunk* referees and players, rather than a load of marketing tosh. There are a number of articles discussing the game and elements of the campaign structure, new corporations, new equipment, new technology types and a host of other items which are invariably of high quality. Again, another one which *Cyberpunk* referees really can't afford to miss.



http://www.nyherji.is/~runarm/cyber.html

Shadowrun

What's it called?

Brett's Shadowrun Page

And what's it like?

Again, this is an amateur job, but much of its appeal lies in that. One of the most intriguing

http://www.csc.liv.ac.uk/~brett/shadowrun/

elements of this site is the section where the constructor (Brett, one would presume), details the two *Shadowrun* campaigns that he has run. It's always interesting to read about how other referees run their games and what they've got up to with their groups – this site provides ample opportunity to do just that. Likewise, Brett has posted up his group's house rules for the game, and whether you opt to use them or not, they're certainly useful for tailoring your own rules amendments. With all this, plus some new bits and pieces of technology and equipment, this is a fine *Shadowrun* site and worth a few minutes of your time.

Traveller

What's it called?

Traveller: Science Fiction in the Far Future

And what's it like?

This is a massive site, and ploughing through its contents will take you an age, so be prepared. Having said that, everything that you can find here is well worth reading, because it mixes general discussion and 'what if?' type articles with rules revisions, sample adventures, campaign details, 3D starmaps, FAQs and a bunch of other stuff. There is also a collection of links to other (equally useful) sites and mailing lists. Admittedly, the

http://www.missouri.edu/~ccjoe/traveller/

amount of material for each of the versions of the *Traveller* game aren't equally mixed, but then, with the release of the new version (which is not set in any specific time period in the *Traveller* universe), that's no bad thing.

TELL US

We hope that the information we print in **arcane** is useful to you. To help us make it even better, why not let us know which web sites you use regularly, and where they are? Then we can tell everyone else. Email us at arcane@futurenet.co.uk

LOOK OUT

In a couple of month's time, we expect to be giving away a CD-ROM with **arcane** that'll let you have ten hours free access to a multi-player on-line game. Watch this space for details...

free reader ads

We've got games to buy and sell, and people to play them with. We've got tarot and football – and we also think we know where the weresheep are.

games for sale

● A bargain! *TWG:2000 2nd ed* + 11 supplements – £28. 60 A4 sheets of GW floorplans, 48 in shop condition – £10. Plus more. For a list phone Dave immediately on 01279 462040

● *AD&D, Spelljammer, Immortals, Hollow World, Mystara* for sale. Send me a SSAE for lists. DM Whitfield, 13 Winchester Road, Hants PO2 7PS

● Amiga games for sale. All originals. Stuart Hardy, 33 Fir Tree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ

(You traitor. – The ghost of AP)

● CD32 with 13 games – £100. Various Amiga games – £2-£10 each. Lee, 0113 2713532 after 5pm

● Collector's clear-out. Various items for sale. SAE to M Mason, 16 Colley Hill, Bradwell, Milton Keynes MK13 9DA

● Original *AD&D Fiend Folio*, VGC – £40. *Deities & Demons* – £30. *DM's Guide* – £30. Robert 01202 877645

● *Rolemaster, D&D, RuneQuest* modules and rulebooks for sale at low prices. Over 100 items on offer! Call Jeremy Ries on 01223 328745

● RPGs (inc supps) – *Torg, Space Master, Golden Heroes, Pendragon, DMG 2nd.* Board games – *Dragonlance, Blood Royale, Kings 'n' Things.* Call Ian on 01384 78952

● *Space Master* + companion 1 (boxed) – £20 ono. *Star Strike* + three vessel compendiums (boxed) – £15. *Psi World* (boxed), *TNE Brilliant Lances* – £10 each. *Atlantis Lexicon, Dark Folk, Arduin Adventure* – £7.50 each. *Worlds Beyond, Justifiers, 3G, BattleTech Manual, High Colonies* – £7 each. *Grimtooth's Traps, D&D Book of Marvellous Magic, Talisanta 2nd edition Handbook, Sorcerer's Guide, Cyclopedia volumes I-IV, Maximum Metal, Deep Space, Forlorn Hope, Interface* zines – £5 each. Dave 01642 897139, evenings

David Cox's Games Emporium.

● Various Games Workshop games and add-ons. Call after 6pm and ask for Matt. Nottingham area please. 0115 978 3168

● Want a free RPG? Download *Space Renegade* from `http://www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/~rgh22`

● 20 great roleplaying games for Atari ST computer. Boxed originals. £50 the lot. Steve 0191 477 0912

cards for sale

● *Arcadia* cards for sale or trade. Contact John, 1 Birkland Avenue, Mapperley, Nottingham NG3 5LA. Call 0115 967 4688, after 6pm

● Autographed *Legend of the Five Rings* cards. Contact Bob Hobbs, Box 4545, Middletown, Rhode Island, USA 02842

● For the cards you want at the cheapest prices send list to SA Lake, 74 Newbridge Hill, Bath BA1 3QA

● *Mythos* (limited edition). One starter pack and two boosters. Call Andrew on 0171 813 9072 or e-mail `gothtech@dircon.co.uk`

● *Rage: Legacy of the Tribes* – I have Jorge Bolivar and I want to swap him for Modi Votishal. James 01705 378442

● *ST:TNG, Jyhad, V:TES* and *Rage*. Darryl 0131 553 1139

● *V:TES, Ancient Hearts, Dark Sovereigns, Jyhad, Sabbat* CCG trades. Phone Morien 01452 533629

wanted

● Any RPGs for PC – especially *AD&D*. Best prices paid. Contact Chris Giles, pretty please. University of Wales, Lampeter, PO Box 23, Ceredigion SA48 7YG. E-mail `NP345@Lamp.ac.uk`

● *Dragonlance* modules and accessories. Phone after 6pm. Jeremy 01386 422247

● *Dragonlance* modules from the *DL* series (especially *DL15*). Will pay any reasonable asking price. Also material from *Marvel Superheroes* game (particularly *Ultimate Powers* handbook). Can anyone help? Alan 0191 388 7122 after 4pm

● *Golden Heroes, Super World, Super Hero 2044* and any super scenarios. Details for Steve 01463 831396

● *Ivid the Undying* printout, *Vecna Lives* and *Greyhawk* adventures. Contact Robert Langford, St David's College, PO Box 23, Lampeter SA48 7YG – e-mail `NP134@lamp.ac.uk`

● *M:TG Gauntlet of Might* – artefact from unlimited edition in mint or near mint condition. Ole 01865 326100

● Single *Magic* cards, current rares or any older cards. Steve 01621 784515 (reasonable prices paid)

● *Soldiers of the Queen* wargames rules for *Space 1889* by GDW wanted. Anthony Morton 01483 767394

● *Star Wars Finest – Chromium, Embossed Foil, Matrix, Refractor, Mastervisions, Matrix Redemption* cards. *X-Files* seasons 2 and 3 – *Hologram, Etched Foil, Paranormals Finest, Parallel Foil* cards. Rarity determines price paid. *Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* finest chromium subset widescreen cards. *Merlin Ultimate Premier League 95/96* lasercards 1-5. AMIGA POWER issue 64 with coverdisk. Good prices paid. Lee 0113 271 3532

Would you like a sack for all that, sir? Or perhaps a small van?

contacts

● Bored roleplayer, 24, seeks group, 20+, in Guildford area. Can GM. Call John after 6pm, 01483 455346

● Computer adventurer offers help on many games. Write to Paul Hardy, 33 Firtree Drive, Wales, Sheffield S31 8LZ

● Experienced DM seeks roleplay group for *RuneQuest/Stormbringer*-style game. Contact Paul, Neston 0151 336 5114

● Experienced roleplayer (17) seeks gamers in Anglesey. *AD&D, Star Wars, Shadowrun,* etc. Hywel 01407 740809

● Help! We need a GM to play *AD&D, Star Wars, Cyberpunk* and others. Group of five, age 17-21, Barnsley area. Contact Carl 01226 725177

You should give it a go yourselves. Look at last month's cover feature...

● New to the area. Any roleplayers about? Contact Bruce, 1st floor, 18 Albert Street, Newton Stewart DG8 6EJ

● Norwich RPG/board game group seeks new players. Experience unimportant. Friday evenings. Interested? Contact Kenton 01603 502056

● Novice *M:TG* player wants players or club for regular duels. Sheffield area. Contact Daniel 0114 266 7670

● Novice gamer (14) seeks *AD&D/Cthulhu* players in Bridgwater area. Please help. Stuart 01278 426735

● Players and GMs needed for group. Contact Stephen Ennis, 2c West End Villas, Coundon, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham DL14 8PJ

● Players needed (m/f) to join exotic FRPG (rules light) – heavy on atmosphere. Paul 0115 985 6764

● Players wanted for *GURPS, Star Trek* and others in the Crawley area. Please write to Alec Holland, 29 Banks Road, Pound Hill, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 7BT

● *Shadowrun* players wanted for the Harlow area. 18+ preferred. Male or female. Call Jason 01279 427099

● Wanted – roleplayers (m/f) for existing mixed group. *AD&D* and others, 20+ preferred. Darlington area. Call Mark 01325 469255

● Willing 'victims' required for *Planescape*. Mixed gender group, sense of humour essential! March area, Friday evenings. Chris 01354 657713

● 19 year-old seeks gamers in local area. Willing to play pretty much anything. Simon Bradley 01773 822134

live action

● Alternate Realities. Edinburgh based LARP group. Interested? Contact Andrew on 0131 440 1873 or e-mail `ahar@srv1.med.ed.ac.uk`

● Attention Gathering fans! The Legion is recruiting. New members welcome. Interested? Lord Ordos (Pete) 0181 428 8820 or 838 1163

● Bradford's infamous Vampire Society seeks new blood – e-mail `splegg@comp.brad.ac.uk` for details of our roleplaying system

● *Elemental Lords* fantasy LRP. Magic, monsters and mayhem. Newcomers welcome. Worcestershire based. Contact Paul 01905 428386

● Experienced live roleplayer wants to get in contact with LARP groups around the London area. Gary 0181 749 2688

● For sale – LARP crossbow – £12. John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5 0SL

● LRP investigators/monsters (any age) for a *CoC* LRP event in the South. For more details call Matt 01705 696477, or write to Matt Scott, 180 Stubbington Avenue, Portsmouth, Hants PO2 0JL

● Midgard LRP every Sunday in Bishops Stortford area. Contact Jason 01279 659127 for details, please, please

Play-By-Mail

PBM and fanzines are, of course, two separate things, and will be treated as such in future. So please don't start sending us ads for 'PBM fanzines' or we'll get confused, our glasses will steam up and saliva will start to dribble from our mouths.

● *Anarchy* Fanzine/PBM. Playtesters needed for free first go PBMs. It's free, what's to lose? Craig Boyes, 6 Hill Top Way, Braithwaite, Keighley, W Yorks BD22 6HP

● Any recommendations for a modern era PBM (tanks, planes, assault rifles)? David Cadman, 43 Lodge Hall, Harlow, Essex CM18 7SX

How about this one?

● *Global Aerial Dominion* (new PBM). Apocalyptic war using military aircraft! Send SSAE to Dave, 9 King's Avenue, Marcham, Abingdon OX13 6QA

fanzines

● Article contributions wanted for new wargames/roleplaying fanzine. Any topics. Call Joshua 01452 740969

● Artwork wanted! Amateur and professional for fantasy magazine: violence, magic, vampires, sci-fi. *Role Your Own*, 61 Lord Nelson Street, Nottingham NG2 4AJ

● *Defiant* – CCG fanzine. *Magic, Star Trek, X-Files,* etc. 90p+ SSAE – 65 Jelbert Way, Penzance TR18 3DP. Or call 01736 332800

● Fantasy and science fiction writers/artists required for new magazine. SAE to 12 Shannon Court, 1 Tavistock Road, Croydon CR0 2AL

● Free fantasy and sci-fi magazine now on-line at `http://www.sf-fantasy.com` Includes original artwork gallery, fiction, reviews, conventions + more. Visit us now!

● 'On The Grey Carpet…' Read the next 4,997 words or so only in *Espylacopa 3*. £1.50. Gorgeous. Wes White, Splott's Moor Farm, Wick, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 8JS

● *Roll Your Own* issue 7 + archives. *Vampire* and *Cyberpunk*. 75p+p&p. Cheques payable to Mark Brassington, 61 Lord Nelson Street, Sneinton, Nottingham NG2 4AJ

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● *Tomb 3:* the vampire quarterly. Out now – £2.50. *V:TM, V:TES, Sabbat, Kindred, The Embraced, Necrohunter* + more. Morien 01452 533629

● *Warpstone* issue 3. The *WFRP* fanzine. £2.50 (£9 for 4 issues). John Foody, 10 Colenso Road, Clapton, London E5

● *The Jawa Melting Pot* – a *Star Wars* RPG fanzine – needs submissions! John Greenhaigh, 1 Masefield Avenue, Radcliffe, Manchester M26 3GZ

miniatures

● Figure painting by *Golden Demon* winner. Fast, efficient service. Send SAE to Paul Naylor, 27 Diamond Street, York YO3 7LH

● 15mm *Traveller* and *Laserburn* miniatures or vehicles wanted. Phone or send price list to Danny Kilpatrick, 16 Academy Street, Armadale EH48 3JD

messages

Go to 204 Henwick Street, Worcester if you want to see the weresheep. They say the place is alive with them.

● Congratulations to Nola and Mark Langford on the birth of their son Rowan. Cheers, UMIST RPG Soc

● Great Alex Tingle of Mighty Beard and our Divine Keeper. Pullease play with us. Please! Please! Your servant Paul

● Lazlo Callini burns in Hell. If you want him, come and get him. Rax

● Many apologies my tortured Justicar – but your dear Ms Healsig is indisposed at the moment. Not even your 'refugees from reality' will be able to aid her now.

● Many thanks go to all my friends old and new for making my life on Erdreja so wonderful. I hope we shall all meet again soon. Regards, Heather Sparrow

● Shalla-Halfelven – I have the staff. All of its power is mine. Bow down world. Ha Ha Ha. EL

It's so hard to get the staff these days.

● We are still here. We have always been here. Blessed be the Lost Ones. Forever remain

---

USS Bozeman: Adventures in Hyperspace

It's fireworks night in Sector 999...

Captain No'Face of the Freeship Profit – leave this area at once or be destroyed. Captain Bateson of the USS Bozeman

● Gunboat Rona – do not attack USS Hero or feel the wrath of the Federation. Captain Bateson

Meanwhile, an engineer reports to the bridge that while she was working on the Bozeman's warp core breach, she was sure she saw a small creature scurrying down the ventilation pipes on level 3. What was it? A snotling, perhaps? No, it couldn't have been – not in this genre. But she swears she saw something.

● USS Bozeman escape pod to all allied ships – have sustained severe damage. Hull breach suspected. Mayday! Mayday!

● This is the USS Legless calling any pirate vessels – leave or be nuked! Captain Armstrong

● USS Hero to all ships – my shields are raised. If fired upon I will fire back

● Gunboat Rona – USS Feathered Horse Queen will gladly teleport you out of there on payment of 100 sugar cubes

● Rona to all ships – we are a police vessel. Power down your weapons and we'll go easy

● USS Defiant to Gunboat Rona – you were warned. Shields up. Torpedoes away.

Evasive manoeuvres. Pattern Delta-F16. Cloaking

● Rona internal comms – "Shields up. Lock on Defiant. Fire! Maintain beam. Defiant weapon grid disabled, sir."

The Rona acts too late. One of the Defiant's 16 whistling missiles strikes amidships just as she fires off her own weapons. There is a spectacular explosion and the debris of what was once the Rona is flung out on to its eternal course to oblivion. The Defiant's weapon grid is indeed temporarily disabled but she evades the incoming fire. As the shrapnel of the Rona leaves the sector, the silence is tangible. Initiative is everything. Even in space.

● Captain K'Vor of the IKC Qu'jagh – Raise shields! Hero – take the pirates. Lock disruptors on Hunter. Warp power to weapons – Fire!

The IKC Qu'jagh swiftly raises shields and fires disruptors in the same move. The renegade Warcruiser CEV Hunter shakes to a halt. Shields are down. Power is down.

● We are the Borg. We will assimilate everyone in Sector 999. We will assimilate the Federation.

You reckon.

roleplaying clubs and societies

● **Black Country Roleplaying Society**, Thursdays, 7.30pm. Blackheath Coronation Social Club, Park Street, Rowley Regis, West Midlands. All ages and games – 70p a night.
Steve Turner 01384 235244

● **Bradford Games Club**, Sundays, 11am-6.30pm Gingerbread Centre, Darley Street, Bradford Centre. "We play anything"

● **East Midlands RPGA/Harlequins Games Club**, Sundays, 1.45-6pm. 2nd Arnold (St Marys) Scout HQ, Atherley House, Calverton Road, Arnold, Nottingham.
Simon Stoppard 0115 921 5533
John Harris 0115 939 4185
sara@theleys.demon.co.uk

● **Finchley Games Club**, Thursdays, 6.30-10.30pm. Old Finchleians Sports Club, Woodside Park. Now in its tenth year.
Seren 0181 202 3856

● **Glasgow University Gaming Society**, Thursdays (term time only), 5pm. Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens. Non-students welcome.

● **Guild of Melée and Magic**, Various days, Various venues. First visit free, annual membership £5
Central – *Jason 0181 715 8675*
West – *Gerald 0181 991 1297*
East – *Douglas 0181 553 5332*
South – *Jon 0181 699 9654*

● **Ring of Mages**, *M:TG* club.
Jamie 01888 544880

● **Manticore Games Club**, Thursday, 7.30pm. Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead. Cards, board games, RPGs.
Steve 0181 903 5446

● **Pembrokeshire Games Club**, Wednesday, 6-9pm. Community Education Centre, Haverfordwest. *Magic, AD&D, Vampire, Necromunda.*
Adam 01437 762633

● **Redcar Adventurers Roleplaying Games Club**, Friday, 6-9pm. Redcar Library.
John 01287 642523

● **Roleplayers of Chester**, Wednesdays, 7.30pm-late. Chester Rail Club, Hoole
Greg 01606 883698 or *Allison 0151 200 6945*

● **Rugby Players Guild**, Monday, 7.30-11.00pm. Players and GMs (18+) welcome
Bill 01788 334165
Keary 01788 334941

● **Spartan Circle Club**, Sunday, 6.30-10.30pm. St Laurence's Centre, Northfield, Birmingham
Paul Rickards 0121 415 4722

● **East Kilbride Games Club**, "Speak fish man!"
John 01355 260601

● **The Albion Guard Games Club**, Mondays and Tuesdays. The Plough, Dog's Head Street, Ipswich.
Keith 01473 289560

● **The Orc's Armpit**, Second Wednesday every month. Hobson's Choice, Banbury. *Magic, Trek* CCGs. *Earthdawn, Warhammer* RPGs.

● **Wandsworth RPG**, Mondays, 7.30pm. 57a Heathfield Road, Wandsworth
Dave 0171 738 1807

● **West London Card Games**, Tuesdays. The Castle, Acton. *Magic, Star Wars*, etc.
John 0171 772 1957 (days)
0181 993 4439 (evenings)

If you want your gang included here, tell us the name of your club, the days and times you meet, what and where you play, and a contact name and number. We'll print it next month. For nothing.

Mexico 1970/tarot

● 70s-style Brazil shirt. Pelé 10. Never worn – £10. 1970 World Cup sticker album in great condition – £50 ono. Lee 0113 2713532

● Free Tarot/Numerology consultation by post. Hand written. Confidential. UK only. Numerology requires DOB. SSAE to Matt – Free Reading, 5 Moorcroft Close, Cheadle, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs ST10 1HT

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A yuletide Gnome World
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING. ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE
'TIS YULETIDE IN TROLLWOOD, AND COLD THROUGH AND THROUGH (WE DAREN'T SAY WHAT IT'S COLD AS, BUT WITCHES HAVE TWO). THERE'S NO SCOFF IN THE PANTRY, NO FUEL FOR THE GRATE QUOTH OLD MOTHER TROLLKIN-
THIS IS BLEEDIN' GREAT!
JUST THEN COMES A THUMP FROM ABOVE ON THE ROOF...
INTRUDERS! PESTS! BURGLARS! BLEEDIN' FLIP! STREUTH!
BY THE WINDOW, YOUNG TINY IS DREAMING OF TUCK...
I 'OPE PA GETS HOME SOON WITH PLENTY OF SCRAN, OR THE ENTREE THIS YULE FEAST IF GOING TO BE GRAN!
OH, CHARMING!
I WISH THE YULE FAIRIES WOULD BRING US SOME LUCK
IN FEAR THEY STAND READY. THERE'S A HAND AT THE LATCH... IT IS FATHER!
'ERE, LOOK WHAT I FOUND ON THE THATCH!
FROM THE CHIMNEY THERE BILLOWS A SOOTY BLACK PALL...
QUOTH TINY -
THE FAERIES HAVE ANSWERED MY CALL!
NOW THERE'S FOOD AND THERE'S KINDLING, THE YULE FEAST'S BEGUN!
EAT DRINK AND BE MERRY! GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE!
The very Merry End

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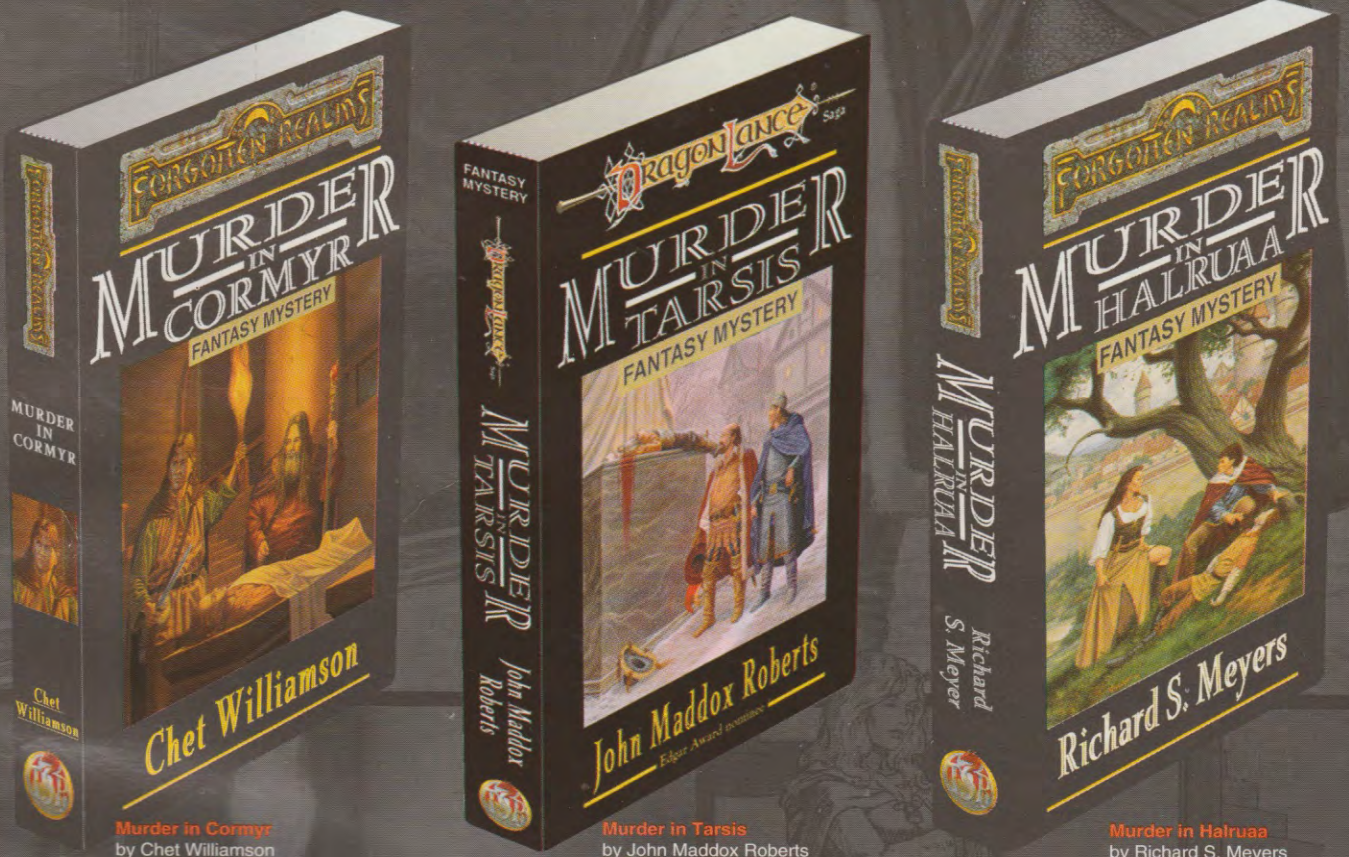

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